

# THE ARGOSY.

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## COLONEL FANE'S SECRET.

BY SYDNEY HODGES, AUTHOR OF "WHEN LEAVES WERE GREEN."

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### CHAPTER XVI.

#### A FRIEND IN NEED.

MR. FRANCIS BATES, F.R.S., was an early riser. Winter and summer he was astir by half-past six. In the former season he lit the asbestos fire in his study, in the latter he threw wide the window to take in the morning air, which came to him tolerably fresh from the Regent's Park, for he lived in Gloucester Terrace. In both seasons he made himself a cup of tea by means of a portable apparatus, which he always had at hand, and then he was ready for those abstruse calculations, astronomical or otherwise, which had made his fame in the scientific world. Punctually at half-past eight he breakfasted alone, for his widowed and invalid sister who lived with him was seldom down at that hour. At nine he usually sallied forth for an hour's stroll in the Park, or in winter, if the frost were sufficiently intense, to indulge in an hour's skating on the ornamental waters.

Mr. Bates was not yet forty, though he looked older, for the lines of thought were pretty deeply indented on his capacious forehead, and his hair, though still dark, was beginning to show signs of greyness.

Although his life was chiefly devoted to study, he was not too old to feel enjoyment in the recreations of life. He was an ardent Alpine climber, and, as already stated, enjoyed ice in another form in winter by means of his skates.

Mr. Bates was a wealthy man. His grandfather and father had been manufacturers in the Midlands, and had intended Bates to follow in their footsteps. From childhood, however, he had shown a predilection for experimenting, which the father vainly endeavoured to check. At ten years old he literally electrified his parents by giving them shocks from an electrical machine of his own construction. Shortly after, having borrowed a Leyden jar and charged it, he

attempted the notable experiment of illuminating the frame of a chimney-glass by making a communication between the jar and the frame by means of a poker. Unfortunately he overlooked the fact that it was necessary to hold the poker by means of a non-conductor, and took hold of it with his naked hand. The electric current naturally preferred the nearer object to the more distant one, and entered Bates junior's body instead of the gilt frame. The result was so disastrous, that Bates senior came to the conclusion that a "little learning," especially in connection with electricity, was a "dangerous thing," and consented to allow his son to pursue his investigations in his leisure time under proper supervision.

Bates junior went to Rugby and to Cambridge, leaving the University with high honours, chiefly mathematical, for he never took kindly to the classics. Shortly after, his father died, and he inherited a large fortune as well as a sleeping partnership in the Mill. He was free to do as he liked, and at once went in heavily for science. He was lucky enough to be close at hand when a certain cavern was discovered in the limestone of a southern county, and the report he drew up was so eminently satisfactory, that he was appointed by the Royal Society to explore it systematically. This he did so thoroughly, and brought such wonders to light, that he at once took a high position in the scientific world. Not content with reaping honours from mundane matters, he must needs cast his eyes above, and discovered a new star in a certain constellation where no star had any business to be. The star waxed larger and larger, however, for the purpose, it seemed, of blazoning the name of Bates, until at last even ordinary people could not fail to see it or to connect it with Bates. From this time his fame was assured, and the star, having accomplished its object, dwindled and finally disappeared, but not before Bates had drawn up a masterly monogram on the subject, which gained him admittance to the ranks of the august society before mentioned.

Mrs. Meredith, his sister, had an only son aged six. He was a bit of a pickle, and was getting a little too much for his indulgent mother. Master Frank (named after his uncle) was the cause of a good many arguments between the brother and sister. Bates was nothing if not logical, and he thought his sister remarkably illogical with regard to Frank, of whom he was very fond.

"You say you cannot manage him, and you get angry with him," said Bates. "You visit on the boy the results of your own folly. You spoil him so completely at three years old that he ruled you with a rod of iron. Naturally he cannot now understand your ruling him, and he does not intend you to. You try to educate him, and he won't listen to a word you say. I submit, however, that you have no right to visit on him the results of your own indulgence."

"I did not indulge him more than other mothers indulge their children," remonstrated his sister.

"Then I can only say other mothers are equally illogical if they

object to the wilfulness they have themselves fostered. My advice to you is to get some one else to teach him."

"If I could find a suitable person I would; but I should not care for anybody."

"Well, no. I should not exactly choose the chimney-sweeper's wife myself; but I daresay we can find some suitable person if we try."

The suitable person was nearer at hand than he thought.

Mr. Bates was walking home across the Park after his morning turn on the ice. He was thinking over a circumstance which had occurred the previous night at the Royal Institution.

"I am sorry I made Brown look a fool, after all," he said; "but he certainly gave himself away."

The circumstance he referred to was this: a well-known traveller had been reading a paper on his experiences in North-West Canada. He had referred to the various animals he had shot there, including the moose. A discussion followed the reading of the paper, and a man who was rather fond of hearing himself talk had referred to what he called the wonderful provision of Providence in furnishing the moose with a horn on the end of its nose, to enable it to scrape away the snow in winter so as to get at its food.

At this point Bates was seen to smile, and the speaker, detecting the smile, turned at once, saying:

"My friend Mr. Bates smiles. May I venture to ask him if he discerns from my observation?"

"I do," answered Bates quietly.

"May I ask on what grounds?" persisted the speaker.

"Simply for this reason," replied Bates—"the moose sheds this horn in winter."

An audible titter went round the assembly, and the orator sat down with evident chagrin written in his face.

Bates was turning this over in his mind as he reached the Broad Walk. A lady was walking at a brisk pace in the opposite direction. As she passed Bates a sudden look of recognition came into her face. She turned quickly aside as if to avoid being recognised herself. In so doing she slipped on the icy surface of the walk, and would have fallen had not Bates sprung forward and caught her by the arm. Their eyes met. There was a moment of bewildered uncertainty in Bates's mind, and then he recognised her.

"Miss Fane! How do you do? You do not remember me?"

"Oh, yes, I do—quite well. Thank you so much for coming to my help. You saved me from an awkward fall."

"I am glad to think so. I did not know you were in London."

Bates had heard of her trouble, but he was too delicate-minded to refer to it. He noticed, too, that her face was terribly changed.

"Are you staying in town?" he asked.

"Yes—for the present," she replied.

"Your friends are away, I hear."

"Yes."

"Are you in town alone?" Bates asked this from a feeling of commiseration for her lonely life.

"Yes; I am in lodgings."

Bates hesitated a moment. "Will you allow my sister to come and call on you? She would be very glad, I know, to make your acquaintance."

Vera did not know what to reply. She had the strongest reasons for wishing to conceal the fact that she was in town. Moreover, her lodgings, of the humblest description in a very poor locality, were not, as she knew, a fit place for anyone to come to. After what had occurred in Dublin, and her sudden flight, she wished to hide all trace of her whereabouts. For this reason she had tried to avoid recognition. She knew, however, that Bates's suggestion was kindly meant. She thought it better to be candid with him.

"It is very good of you to think of such a thing," she said; "but I have been in great trouble, and I fear I could not receive any visitors at present."

"I know. I heard of your trouble. Believe me, I sympathise with you most deeply. But surely it is not good for you to shut yourself up too much? But do not let me keep you standing in the cold too long. I will walk on with you."

A sudden resolve came into Vera's mind. There was such genuine kindness in Bates's tone that she determined to confide in him. They went on a little way, and then she said:

"Oh! Mr. Bates, perhaps you can help me—I am in search of occupation. It is absolutely necessary that I should find something to do. Can you assist me?"

"It would give me the greatest possible pleasure to do so if I can. What kind of thing do you want?"

"Anything. I do not care what it is as long as it is respectable. Companion—amanuensis—anything."

"Should you object to teaching?"

"No; but I am afraid I am hardly clever enough for that."

"We must see about this. You will not object to give me your address? I may be able to help you at once."

It rose in his mind, in fact, that here was the very person for his sister and her child. The meeting seemed quite providential.

"I cannot tell you how much obliged I shall be if you will," said Vera. "I have been quite in despair. It is very good of you."

"Indeed, I am only sorry for the necessity!" said Bates.

"I have no card with me," said Vera; "but perhaps you would kindly write down my address?"

"Certainly," said Bates, taking out his note-book. "What is it?"

She named so humble a locality that Bates could hardly conceal his surprise. He wrote it down, however.

"And now," he said, "I will leave you. I cannot tell you how glad I shall be if I can be of use to you! We had such a pleasant



time together in Jersey. I fear you were rather horrified with my views; but I can assure you I am not the ogre I seem."

"Indeed, I think you are very kind-hearted; I do not know how to thank you sufficiently."

Her eyes filled with tears in spite of herself. Bates could not help observing it—he was deeply moved.

"Come, come," he said—"we all have our troubles! Let us hope yours will soon end. I shall see you again shortly. Good-bye, and keep up your heart."

"Good-bye," answered Vera falteringly. "You are so very, very kind."

They shook hands and parted. In spite of her tears, Vera went on her way with a lighter heart. A sympathetic word, even from a casual acquaintance, relieved to some extent the dreadful oppression which had weighed on her heart ever since her terrible experiences in Dublin. There was such marked sympathy and kindness in Bates's manner that she felt she had found a friend indeed.

She thought it probable that if Grace or Mr. Colborne made an attempt to trace her, they would apply at once to Mrs. King at her old lodgings; she had therefore avoided going there. Since the revelation about Hugh, she had not even given her address to her old servant in Jersey, who had always forwarded her letters. Even if the silence which Hugh had maintained for so many weeks were now broken, she knew that anything he might write would only increase her misery. It would be better for her not to hear. She felt that whatever he might say, he could no longer be the idol she had worshipped. No—from henceforth she must fight her battle of life alone, however bitter the strife might be.

Bates went home to his sister.

"My dear," he said, "I think I have found the very person to suit you. You remember that pretty Miss Fane I told you I met in Jersey? Well, I saw her to-day in the Park, and had a chat with her. She has lost her father, and is thrown on the world, as it were. She is very sweet and gentle in manner, and has quite enough learning to teach Frank. She is most anxious to get something to do; in fact, she told me so. What do you say?"

"I should be very glad. It is nicer to have some one you know something about."

"I quite agree with you. Well, then, if you approve, I will see her and arrange with her."

"Perhaps it might be better for me to see her first. It is not every one Frank would get on with. Could you not ask her to call?"

"Certainly. It would be the best plan. I have her address. I will see her at once."

So in the afternoon of the same day Bates called at the address Vera had given him. It was in a small street leading out of the Hampstead Road consisting of quite poor little houses. A dirty-looking woman with

a baby in her arms came to the door in answer to his knock. She informed him that Vera was out.

"I reckon she's gone out to her tea, sir," she said. "She have only a bedroom, and don't take her meals here. I can't undertake the cooking."

"I saw her this morning," said Bates. "She looks very ill. Has she been with you long?"

"No, sir, only a week or two. You'll excuse me, sir, if she's a friend of yours; but it's my belief she don't have enough to eat. Sometimes when she's in all day, she don't take only a little tea and a morsel of bread and butter. Not enough to keep body and soul together, as you may say."

"I am very sorry to hear it," answered Bates, who was inexpressibly shocked. "We must try and set that right."

"Who shall I say called, sir?" the woman asked.

"Mr. Bates—or stay," he added, "perhaps it would be better not to say I called; and of course you will not let her know that you have told me anything about her affairs. It might distress her."

"Of course not, if you don't wish it, sir."

"I will write and tell her what I want. It will do just as well. Meanwhile perhaps you might be able to look after her comfort a bit," he added, slipping some silver into the woman's hand.

"I will do my best, you may be sure, sir, but with seven to look after and only my Jane to help, it's hard work."

"I should think it was," said Bates, as he turned to go. "Well good-day, and be sure you don't say I have called."

Bates was terribly upset by what he had heard. "It is no wonder," he thought, "that she does not want any one to call on her. Poor thing! Poor thing! What a contrast to the brightness of life at Gorey! What a world it is! Why should this poor innocent girl be singled out for such suffering while a lot of selfish wretches are rolling in riches? Where does the Providence come in? It is hard to see."

Late the same evening Vera received the following letter.

"MY DEAR MISS FANE—I mentioned to my sister who lives with me your desire to obtain some occupation. It so happens that she wishes to engage some one to look after and educate her little boy, aged six. She has hitherto taught him herself, but she is not strong, and requires help. If you are disposed to undertake it, could you call and see my sister any time to-morrow morning? you will not, I think, find the duties irksome, and we should feel much indebted to you if you can undertake them. Believe me,

"Yours most sincerely,

"FRANCIS BATES."

This letter was like a sunbeam breaking through the clouds to Vera. If Bates could have realised what a relief it was to her mind, he would not have wondered where the Providence came in.

After that terrible day at Dublin, Vera had left by the early morning boat and travelled straight to town. Not knowing, in her inexperience, the consequences of her action, she feared even to return to Mrs. King's, thinking she might be followed there. She knew not what penalties might attach to her sudden desertion of the company, although she felt that nothing short of actual force should induce her to return after that scene with Colborne. She had reached London with only about thirty shillings in her purse, and she knew that the strictest economy must be practised to enable her to exist in lodgings even for a week or two. She was too much overcome with the experience of the last day in Ireland to enter upon any active course at present. She found a room for a reasonable rent not far from the station at which she arrived, and in her dread of being left absolutely penniless, she had half starved herself during the week she had been in town. Her difficulties were increased by her entire ignorance of the best places to obtain even the scanty meals upon which she subsisted. The utter loneliness of her life was such that a sort of dull despair took possession of her mind, which made her feel that it was impossible to rise again from the wretched lethargy into which she had fallen.

Although Mr. Bates's letter was an unspeakable relief in the midst of her suffering, it was with some difficulty that she could brace her nerves to the task of calling on the following morning. She felt, however, that her whole future might depend on it, and Bates's manner had been so kind and sympathetic, that she hoped she might meet a kind friend in his sister also.

She reached Gloucester Terrace as the clock struck eleven, and was admitted by a genial-looking man-servant—an old retainer; but before she had crossed the hall, Bates, who had just returned from his morning exercise, and was evidently on the look-out for her, came from his study and gave her a cordial greeting.

"You are in good time," he said. "I hope it means that you think favourably of my sister's offer."

"It is most kind of her to make it. I only hope I am competent to undertake the duties."

"They are not likely to be arduous, and it is we who are under the obligation if you will undertake them."

He led the way to the drawing-room. On all sides Vera was conscious of signs of affluence—in the width and thickness of the stair-carpets, the rich but artistic wall-papers, the costly window-draperies, and the profusion of choice pieces of china and elegant knick-knacks which met her gaze on every side. Her recent experience of bare and uncomfortable dressing-rooms in provincial theatres, and of her still more uncomfortable, poverty-stricken lodgings, made the contrast with her present surroundings still greater. It was a comfort to her to find herself confronted by cleanliness, to say nothing of the luxury. It was like stepping into a brighter world.

Mrs. Meredith entered the room by another door almost at the same moment. "I am very glad to see you," she said, advancing and shaking hands. "I have heard so much of you from my brother, and I hope we shall suit each other."

She seemed to take it for granted that the matter was settled; but Vera was still troubled by the thought that she was too inexperienced for the post.

"Are you sure I shall suit you?" she said. "I have had no experience in this way."

"Oh, as to that, I do not think it matters!" said Mrs. Meredith. "Frank is quite young. He will not require much teaching, and I shall generally take him off your hands in the afternoons. Then again my brother's pursuits cause me to be a good deal alone in the evenings, and I go out so very little. I assure you I shall be very glad of your companionship."

Mrs. Meredith had a gentle and engaging manner. She was slight in figure, and there was a look of suffering in her face, for she had been delicate for years. Her husband, who had been a civil engineer of some renown, had been killed by a terrible accident during the construction of a railway-bridge of vast dimensions. His widow had never entirely recovered from the shock, which had shattered her nervous system. Her hair was prematurely grey, and there were lines upon her forehead indicative of long-continued sorrow.

There was not much to be discussed. Mrs. Meredith who, as well as her brother, was one of those lucky ones of the earth who had never at any time had to consider ways and means, offered Vera a salary which seemed a small fortune to her in her present straitened circumstances—far more indeed than she felt her services were worth. Both the brother and sister were anxious for her to come as soon as possible, and as Vera had little or nothing to prepare, she arranged to take up her abode with them in two or three days. Then Master Frank was had down from his nursery, and clinched the matter by taking to Vera at once, confiding to his mother afterwards that he was sure he should like her as she was very pretty and didn't look a bit cross.

On the way down to the hall Bates stopped Vera on the landing, saying:

"I hope, Miss Fane, you won't think me obtrusive, but, after what you told me, it struck me that perhaps your first quarter's salary in advance might be of use to you. Do favour me by accepting this."

He put an envelope into her hand. She looked at him in rather a bewildered way.

"But, Mr. Bates, I have not earned it," she answered.

"Oh, but I'm sure you will! Pray do not refuse me."

"It is more than kind of you," she said. "I really do not know how to thank you for all your consideration."

"Well, do not thank me at all; we shall hope to see you in a day or two. Will you let me send for a cab for you?"

"Oh, no, thanks, it is no distance! Good-bye!"

She went on her way with a lighter heart than she had felt since that fatal afternoon in Dublin. Bates stood looking after her.

"There is something more in her trouble than her father's death or her narrow means," he said. "She has had a still more recent shock or I am no physiognomist. Well, we must do our best to make her happy, poor thing!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

HALTON.

THE money was a godsend to Vera. She had her lodgings to pay up and her wardrobe was sadly deficient. The twenty pounds Bates had enclosed was a larger sum than she had ever before had at her disposal. It seemed a veritable Golconda! How thoughtful it was of him, and how kind they both were! If it were not for the everlasting cloud that hung over her in connection with the past, she felt that she could be almost happy. What a different life was before her now, and how much more congenial to her tastes and feelings! She must endeavour to forget the past. Alas, how vain the endeavour seemed! On one thing she was determined. To no one would she confide her present occupation or even her address. She must run no risk of a recurrence of the scenes she had just gone through. Hugh's silence and the knowledge of what had passed between him and Grace made him appear to her like one dead. Oh, if that unclouded summer morning could only come back! But no, it was not to be. She must make up her mind to face the future without him.

To her old friend in Jersey she wrote as follows—

"MY DEAR OLD NURSE—I have found some work—work that will suit me very well, and for which I am well paid. I do not wish *anyone* to know where I am at present. I do not, therefore, send you my address, but I will write to you from time to time to let you know how I am. Perhaps, before long, I may be able to run over and see you. I hope you are keeping well. With much love, I am,

"Ever yours affectionately,

"VERA."

To Grace she also wrote—

"MY DEAR GRACE—do not be anxious about me. I have already found some work and shall be well paid. Perhaps one day I may let you know why I left you so suddenly. I hope so much that you are better. I do not send you my address, as my whereabouts at present must be a secret from everyone. Forgive me for the trouble my departure must have caused you, and believe me,

"Ever yours affectionately,

"VERA."

These letters she posted at some distance from her lodgings. They seemed the last links with the past. Henceforth she must try and live in the future. "May God give me strength to face it bravely," she sighed.

There is no doubt that a well-appointed house is a great factor in the enjoyment of life. The coming down in the morning to a profusely-spread breakfast-table with its snowy cloth, spotless silver and freshly-cut flowers; the lounge in the morning-room among the leading papers and magazines. The substantial lunch—the afternoon drive in the luxurious carriage with its footwarmers, ample rugs, and ever-attentive footman. The afternoon tea with its delicate china and elegant little table; the pleasant visitors, the light laughter and smiling faces; the sumptuous dinner-table with its *recherché* dishes, its shining plate and costly fruits; the order, the regularity, the ceaseless attention from softly-gliding servants, who, without effort, anticipate your every wish—all these things smooth away the angles of life in a way that is denied to those who have to consider every shilling in their expenditure, and to make both ends meet in the best way they can. To poor Vera, whose struggle for existence in the last few months had been so severe, the change to the luxury of her present life was a thing she could hardly realize, but for which she felt duly thankful.

But wealth cannot insure us everything, least of all health. A week of choking fog came down on London, not exempting even the Regent's Park. Poor Mrs. Meredith succumbed at once. A bronchial affection, which had become almost chronic, attacked her with unusual virulence, and for some days she had to keep her room.

"This will never do," said her brother, when she again made her appearance at luncheon. "We must get away to Halton at once. You are always better there."

"But it will not be convenient for you to go so early."

"Well, there certainly are some things I want to attend to in town, but health is the first thing, and now you have got Miss Fane I can settle you in and run to and fro. You won't be lonely now. Besides, if this wretched fog lasts I shall only be too glad to get out of it myself. You don't know Halton, Miss Fane. It is our country retreat which we run down to whenever we get the chance—generally a little later in the spring. I think you will like it."

"Where is it?" asked Vera.

"In Hampshire, within sound of the sea and not so very far from the New Forest."

"It must be delightful!"

"Well, we think it so, and I hope you will, especially after this atmosphere. Ten degrees of frost this morning, and you can't see across the road. I dare say the sky is as blue as it is in June at Halton at this present moment. We will go to-morrow if you think you can stand the journey, my dear."



"I will take the risk, to get out of this hateful atmosphere," said Mrs. Meredith.

So the matter was settled. To Vera the idea was delightful. She was still under the impression that some one connected with her former life might be on her track. She had broken her contract and she was not sure what the penalty might be, no matter what provocation she might have received. In her ignorance she had even visions of detectives dogging her footsteps. To get away from London to the free open country was delightful to her, and she felt more and more how deep a debt of gratitude she owed to Mr. Bates and his kind sister for the relief they had given her.

There were various matters to be settled the next day before they could start, and they did not get away till late in the afternoon. Instructions had been sent on the previous day, and a close carriage was awaiting them at the station nearest their destination. Darkness had settled over the land before they reached Halton, some three miles from the station, and beyond the fact that the house was very large and that they had reached it by a road bordered with pines, Vera could see nothing.

There was a huge fire of logs blazing in the hall, which was large and comfortable, furnished with fine old oak, thickly carpeted, and with rich rugs and skins scattered in profusion on the floor. On two sides were cases filled with stuffed birds, stuffed snakes, buffalo heads, heads of the elk, the reindeer and various other specimens of natural history. There were cabinets also containing relics of primeval man, spear-heads, arrow-heads, odd bits of bone, geological specimens, forming altogether a veritable museum.

Through a door on one side Vera beheld the large dining-room with the table laid in a more sumptuous style even than in town. The servants had preceded them, and things seemed to be going on with the same precision and regularity as if they had been there a month. Vera had been impressed with the fact when in town that Bates was a wealthy man, but here things seemed to be on a scale of grandeur which she had not anticipated.

"Welcome to the ancestral home," said Bates, smiling, and taking her hand, "or, at least, what would have been the ancestral home, only it was built by my grandfather when he deserted the smoke of Lancashire to revel in the sunny south."

"It is very charming!" said Vera.

"Wait till you see it on a fine day—to-morrow, perhaps, if we are lucky—I think you will be pleased with it. Moreover, we have bought a few ancestors and despoiled a few real old mansions for the sake of their oak. Too bad, isn't it? But now we have not much time to lose. I am simply ravenous, and dinner will be ready in twenty minutes."

The old housekeeper, a favourite domestic of the time of Bates's father, showed Vera up the broad staircase to her room; a very



comfortable one, with a cheerful fire, easy-chairs and a couch, a writing-table, with its elegant appointments, and a case loaded with books of all descriptions. Marvelling at the pleasant ways into which she had fallen, she hastily dressed, and was about to find her way downstairs when Frank came bounding along the corridor and seized her hand.

"Come along, Miss Fane—I'm going to take you down! I'm to dine with you to-night. Oh, it is so jolly to be here—so much better than that beastly old London! I wish mother would live here always."

"You like this better?"

"I should just think I did. Why, there are the dogs, and the monkey, and the parrots, and the golden pheasants, and the pony, and all sorts of things; then I go and see Thorn in the stables, and take Nep for a run—Nep's the big Newfoundland, you know. Oh, it is jolly being here! And there's the sea close by. I'll show you the way there to-morrow. Will you come out with me before breakfast?"

"Yes, if it is fine."

"Oh, it will be fine! It *must* be to-morrow, because I want it to be. Do you like the sea?"

"Yes; I lived by the sea before——"

She stopped abruptly; the past, with all its recent sorrows, came back to her with a sickening rush. Oh, would she ever forget?

"Before what?" asked Frank, unmindful of her pain.

She was spared an answer by Bates who met them at the foot of the stairs and led the way to the drawing-room, where, in a few minutes, Mrs. Meredith joined them, and then dinner was announced.

"I must try and become a civilised being and breakfast with you and Miss Fane while we are here," said Bates when they had taken their places at the table. "I will condescend to wait till nine o'clock if you think you can be down by that time."

"If I am not I am sure Miss Fane will be very pleased to pour out your tea," said his sister. "This is a concession to you, Miss Fane. He has never broken his half-past-eight rule for me."

"I am sure I feel very much flattered," said Vera, "but I have no objection to half-past eight if I can be of any use."

"No; I strike at that," said Mrs. Meredith. "I may sometimes manage nine o'clock, but not half-past eight."

"Well, I don't wish to be a slave-driver," answered Bates. "We will say nine."

"Do slave-drivers always have breakfast at half-past eight, then?" asked Frank innocently.

"Bless the child, how literal he is!" said Bates, laughing. "No, my boy; they get it when they can, I imagine. A good thing if they didn't get it at all, the scamps."

"Then the slaves might not get any," said Frank argumentatively.

"I'll tell you what, my boy, I shall have to take your education on myself. You'll be tackling the Differential Calculus next."

"What's that, uncle?"

"You must get Miss Fane to explain. I'm too busy with this cutlet at present."

"I never even heard of it," said Vera.

"No, of course you have not. You would not be a woman if you had. By the way, how is it that so few women care anything about science or mathematics? Are their brains differently constituted? You may tell them of the greatest wonders, the greatest facts in astronomy—show them the craters in the moon even and they don't seem to think it at all wonderful."

"I should like very much to see the craters in the moon. How can I?" asked Vera.

"Would you, really? It's a very simple matter if you wish to. I'll have the telescope ready for you to-morrow night. Let me see, the moon is entering its second quarter now; just the right time."

"Have you a telescope here?"

"Oh, yes; in the observatory!"

"And I've seen Jupiter's moons and Saturn's rings, and the mountains in the moon, haven't I, uncle?" struck in Frank.

"It's his pet child, Miss Fane," said Mrs. Meredith. "He values it more than his sister or his nephew. I wonder he can ever tear himself away from it."

"That's the sort of encouragement I get for my nightly vigils, you see, Miss Fane. But the glass is really a fine one. I put it together myself, so I ought to be proud of it."

"I should so like to look through it," said Vera, whose ideas of telescopes were confined to the glasses of coastguardmen on the beach.

"You don't look through it, you look into it," said Frank, proud of his superior knowledge.

"Listen to the modern Tycho Brahe!" said Bates. "If he picks up spelling as he picks up astronomy, he will not give you much trouble, Miss Fane."

"He could teach me astronomy, it seems," said Vera.

"That depends on whether you take advantage of your opportunities. You may become a second Mrs. Somerville."

"I am afraid I have a very vague idea of what Mrs. Somerville did. I know she was very clever."

"Quite too dreadfully clever," struck in Mrs. Meredith. "She corresponded with all the scientists of the day. I hope you won't emulate her."

"My sister is the most deadly enemy to science I know," said Bates. "The phenomena of the universe are a blank to her. If you told her the sun would cease to exist to-morrow, she would be quite unconcerned, and would merely say 'Will it?'"

"Well, I have faith in Providence, and should not worry myself."

"And you think Providence would provide another sun? Well, it is a very comfortable belief. *Le soleil est mort, vive le soleil!*"

"That is my belief. Shall we go into the drawing-room, Vera? I beg your pardon, but I seem to know you too well to call you Miss Fane."

"Then pray call me Vera. I like it so much better."

"Very well, then. *Allons*, Vera, and let us leave this dreadful scientist to his own devices! Frank, you must go to bed. You are half asleep now."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### SEA AND SKY.

WHEN Vera opened her eyes the next morning a ray of sunlight was peeping in through a chink in the closely-drawn curtains. It was a thing she had not seen for days, and, wrapping herself in a dressing-gown, she was quickly at the window and drawing up the blinds.

Instead of the frosty fog of London blotting out everything beyond a distance of three yards, she looked upon one of the loveliest sunlit landscapes she had ever beheld. Immediately below her was a lawn studded with beds of winter flowers. Beyond these was a light wire fencing—a protection against the incursions of rabbits which were frisking on a larger lawn beyond, where the hoar frost still lay in the shadows of the trees and shrubs, though the sunbeams had swept the whiteness from the more open parts, and revealed the velvety softness of the well cut and well nibbled lawn. On either side were deep groves of pines which, with their pinky-grey stems and dark and graceful foliage, cast the most fantastic shadows on the grass below. Well-grown specimens of the Wellingtonia, the deodara, and other graceful specimens of the coniferæ were rising here and there against the darker background of the pinewoods. The great charm, however, was straight in front beyond the lawn, where the pines, with the exception of a few graceful stems, had been cleared away and left a view of the country beyond. Undulating slopes of park-land descended to the level pastures below, and then, over miles of trees and woods, an estuary of a river was seen, with a square church tower standing in bold relief against the further blue of the Isle of Wight. The Channel lay like molten silver where the sunlight fell upon it, and, dimly seen through the morning mist, the cliffs above the Needles lay in purple shadow against the radiance beyond. A few far-away ships, with white sails catching the morning beams, were drifting slowly away on the horizon, while above the sky spread broad and blue, except where it was flooded with the glory of the morning light. The view was so inexpressibly lovely that Vera could scarcely withdraw her eyes.

"How can people live in London when they can look on such a scene as this?" she exclaimed. "It is difficult to believe it is the same world."

She dressed as quickly as possible, for she was anxious to get out into the glorious air laden with the perfume from the pines. Her heart was almost light, for it was impossible to resist the charm of the hour and of the scene. She had hardly finished dressing when a small voice was heard at her door.

"Are you ready, Miss Fane? We are to go to the beach, you know."

Frank had not forgotten the arrangement. It was not yet eight o'clock, so they had a clear hour before breakfast. Vera was soon ready, and they issued from the house by a door that led almost immediately to the pine grove. Two small terriers were careering around Frank, evidently in great delight at the anticipation of the morning scampers, and Frank had a basket in his hand containing some food for the golden pheasants in the aviary among the pines. Their path lay past the aviary, where the lovely plumaged birds were awaiting their morning meal, which Frank had begged the gardener to let him give them. The boy was wild with delight, and, having distributed the food impartially, he led the way along a winding path bordered with rhododendrons to where a gate in the wooden palings led into a wilder part of the wood. Passing through the gate, they emerged on to some open spaces covered with dead bracken and brown heather, and, following a broken path across this, they came upon some short turf which crowned a low headland, and there below them was the sea.

It came in silver ripples over the yellow sands—a blaze of living light. The pebbles where the water had washed away the sand were glittering like myriads of diamonds. The faint perfume from the seaweed came up to where they stood, and a slight air from the west which stole across the sands was warm as a summer breeze. A little broken pathway led down to the beach, and the next moment Frank was scampering across the sands with his terriers barking madly in advance.

Vera sat down upon a ridge of the beach and looked far out over the sea. It was all so lovely, but, oh, the intense sadness of it! It all came back—that first morning on the sands at St. Brelade's—the wanderings by the sea at Gorey—that exquisite morning at Brighton!

"God help me!" she sighed. "Am I never to look upon such a scene as this again without this heartbreaking sorrow? I cannot bear it!"

She rose with a stifling sense of oppression at her heart. Action was her only relief.

"Frank," she called, "we must be going back. We shall be late for breakfast."

"Only a minute. I must catch this crab," the boy replied.

He was scraping away the wet sand where the wily crustacean had buried itself, the dogs looking on with ears erect. Vera sat down again resignedly.

"I must conquer it," she said. "It will blight my whole life. Even if he came back I could not be to him what I was. She has a prior claim, and she said she could explain everything. No, no. I *must* root out the feeling from my heart whatever happens."

Just then the cheery voice of Bates broke upon her ear. He was coming over the little headland, and called out to them.

"Ah, I thought I should find you here," he said, advancing. His genial voice seemed to bring relief. It at least diverted her thoughts. "Is it not exquisite?" he said, advancing. "A heavenly morning. But come, Frank, we shall be late. This is a pleasant change from London fog, is it not?"

"Indeed it is," she answered.

There was something in her voice that arrested his attention. He turned and looked at her. She could not control a quiver of the lip, and her eyes were still wet with tears. Bates turned away quickly.

"Come along," he again shouted to Frank. "Now, Miss Fane, take my arm up the slope. It is rather steep."

When they reached the house Bates lingered behind in the room opening from the hall to hang up his hat.

"What can it be?" he said to himself. "It is some hidden grief. I must find out what it is. It is monstrous that so sweet a girl should suffer as she is suffering."

But Vera brightened up at breakfast and seemed quite herself again.

"It is when she is alone," thought Bates. "I must do my best to prevent her being alone."

"Do you ride, Miss Fane?" he suddenly asked.

"I have never ridden anything but a small pony," Vera answered.

"And that is very good practice," said Bates. "I learned to ride barebacked on a Shetland pony in an orchard when I was a small boy. If you can ride a pony you can ride a horse. We'll have a ride after lunch to-day if you like. I suppose you won't go on stuffing Frank with learning all day."

"I don't want him to begin to-day," said Mrs. Meredith. "Let him have his first day free."

"Well, then, Miss Fane, what do you say?"

"I should like it of all things; but I am afraid I shall be very stupid at first, and I have no habit."

"Oh, I can manage a skirt for you," said Mrs. Meredith, "and you can ride my pet mare. She is as quiet as a lamb; in fact, when I get a little stronger, I hope to begin riding again myself. You might take her to see the church, Frank."

"A good idea; but I have a stiff morning's work first, and I must overhaul the telescope. Are you fond of old churches, Miss Fane?"

The Priory Church is worth seeing, and there's Shelley's tomb, or rather, monument. Shall we start at three o'clock?"

"If Mrs. Meredith can spare me," said Vera, glancing at the lady in question.

"By all means, dear. I don't mean you to be tied in the afternoon. Frank will probably go out with me in the pony-carriage."

So it was settled. At three o'clock the horses were brought round. Vera had been provided with a skirt, which, with the aid of a tight jacket, she turned into a decent habit. Bates helped her into her saddle, and then mounted his own horse, a serviceable grey.

Vera's mount was a breedy-looking bay, with remarkably easy action and a tender mouth. They rode away down the drive between the pine groves and presently emerged on to the open ground, across which was the high-road. By this time Vera had settled into her saddle; but the action of the mare, so much higher than anything she had been accustomed to, rather disconcerted her.

"Sit square, and hold her with a light hand," said Bates. "You're getting on all right. Shall we try a bit of a trot?"

They went on, Bates close by her side and a little in advance. Presently the mare broke into a canter, which Vera found easier than the trot. After a mile or so she felt quite at home in the saddle. The bright, crisp air and the unwonted exercise brought the colour to her cheeks. They reached the town, and getting a man to hold the horses strolled into the churchyard.

"Here is a grave," said Bates, "where those unscrupulous Roundheads dug up the coffins for the sake of the lead and turned it into bullets. They stuck at nothing in those days, and as to the amount of beautiful architecture they defaced—why, it's beyond computation."

"I thought you were too practical and matter of fact to value ecclesiastical architecture," Vera ventured so say.

"What! not value some of the most beautiful creations of the hand of man? I value beauty in whatever form it exists, and I appreciate the deep devotion which caused our forefathers to erect these glorious old temples. An act of reverence must always meet with respect in whatever form we find it."

They had reached an angle of the building near the entrance. "Now here," said Bates, "you have a curious illustration of the way in which the intersection of two Norman arches suggested the Gothic arch—at least, they say the Gothic arch arose in this way, and it seems probable."

"Then this old church goes back to the time of the Conquest?"

"Long before. The monastery is said to have been founded by Athelstane. If the stones could speak, what a tale they would have to tell! But now for the interior and Shelley's monument."

They loitered long in the old building. Bates seemed familiar with every stone, and pointed out many architectural curiosities.



Then as the sun drew near the horizon they turned their horses homeward, and on their arrival found Mrs. Meredith presiding at the tea-table, and Master Frank in the full enjoyment of a Noah's ark on the floor. The afternoon had passed so pleasantly that there had been no time for the recurrence of the sad thoughts which had filled Vera's heart in the morning, and, later on at dinner, Bates reminded her that she was to be initiated into the mysteries of the lunar craters that evening.

"You must make a good dinner, for you have a long journey before you, something like two hundred and forty thousand miles."

"I am so looking forward to it—it seems so wonderful. I have not the least idea what it is like."

So after dinner they adjourned to the observatory, Frank having obtained special permission to stay up for a peep also. The telescope was a huge one with clockwork action, and all the latest scientific appliances. The sliding roof of the observatory was pushed back, and the great instrument brought to bear on the moon, which was shining in unclouded splendour above.

"Now, Miss Fane, you must mount these steps, and put your eye to this eye-piece and look straight before you."

Vera wondered how she was to see the moon by looking horizontally, until Bates explained that the rays were caught by a concave mirror at the bottom of the tube and reflected back on to a smaller mirror in front of the eye-piece.

"Now look and tell me what you see," said Bates.

Vera quite started. There are few things more astounding than the first sight of the moon in a fine telescope. The exquisite silvery whiteness, the perfect definition, the innumerable craters, the mountain ranges, the dark plains called seas, the sharply defined shadows of the peaks, the marvellous sensation of actually beholding the details of another world, of roaming as it were among its mountains and looking into the black and awful depths of its vast craters. The heart must be dead indeed to the marvels of creation to behold it all without a strange thrill of wonderment and awe. For a moment Vera could hardly speak.

"It is marvellous," she said at length. "It is so clear that it seems as if I could put out my hand and touch it."

"That is the wonderful part of it," said Bates. "It is almost impossible to believe it is nearly a quarter of a million miles away. Do you see how the rocks come down on to the plains each with its separate and distinct shadow?"

"Yes, and the shadows of the peaks, each like a sharp photograph. But are those really craters?"

"Well, that is the accepted theory, but there are various others. Proctor for instance, propounded a theory that they were indentations caused by the impact of meteorites on the surface of the moon when it was in a semi-fluid state."



"And these dark parts, are they really seas?"

"No, indeed, they are plains. You may see isolated peaks rising from them. There is no water in the moon, otherwise there would be an atmosphere."

"And is there no atmosphere?"

"None that we can detect, though some have thought there is a very attenuated atmosphere in the valleys, but I should say it is improbable. If there were an atmosphere you could not see all the surface so distinctly."

"Then there can be no animal life."

"Nothing corresponding to the life in our own world. Now would you be surprised to hear that all those craters and mountains are mapped and named."

"Indeed!"

"Look to your left, that large grey oval space in the Sea of Crises—the *Mare Crisium*. The very dark, deep cavity near the top on the right is the great crater, Tycho. The semi-circular chain of mountains to the right near the lower part is the Apennines—lower down are the Alps."

"You seem to know it by heart."

"Well, I have looked at it enough. But we will have a longer talk about it another time. If you can get your eye away from it I will let Frank have a peep."

"Oh, I had forgotten! It is so fascinating that it makes one selfish."

"Well, you will have plenty of other opportunities if you care to come again. I will give you a map where you can learn the lunar geography for yourself. Beer and Mädler have mapped several thousand craters."

"Is it possible?"

"Oh, I can assure you astronomers are not idle. The astonishing part of it is that the great mass of mankind are so utterly indifferent to the wonders of the sky."

"But so few possess a telescope."

"I know, but there are wonders to be seen in the sky without the aid of a telescope. Nine people out of ten are dead to the marvels of a sunset sky even."

"I am afraid that is so."

"And they are equally dead to the wonders of astronomy. One night I will show you Saturn and the nebula in Orion and a few other marvels. Frank must have his peep now, for it is long past his bedtime."

"Show me one big crater, uncle, as you did once before."

"Ah, yes, Miss Fane would like to see that too. I have an instrument here for isolating a single crater. With a high magnifying power, it makes it look as big as a crown piece. Now look."

"It is marvellous. You can see every ridge and rock, and the shadows, how perfect!"

Frank was treated to a look in his turn.

"Oh, isn't it jolly!" he exclaimed. "When I grow up I shall have a big telescope too."

"And make some astonishing discoveries, I hope. At any rate I don't mean you to grow up an ignoramus with regard to science. At least if I have my own way with you. By the way, as it is so clear we might just take a peep at Saturn now, eh, Frank? and run the risk of mamma being angry."

"Oh, yes, do, uncle. She won't mind for once and away."

The glass was turned in the required direction, and the planet with its marvellous arrangement of rings came into view.

"Now, Miss Fane, Frank has often seen it. Take a peep."

Vera looked in silent wonder.

"What a marvellous sight!" she at length exclaimed. "I have seen it in pictures, of course, but I never realised that it would look like this. How strange to be encircled by an actual ring of light!"

"It is a bit of a fairy tale; or it would be if it were not such a palpable fact."

"But what are they? There are several rings—one within the other."

"Well, there are several theories about Saturn also. The most popular one is that the rings are composed of an infinite number of tiny satellites revolving around the planet with great rapidity. It is difficult to realise it, but it is the most likely theory. That is the planet that puzzled poor Galileo. With his imperfect instrument he mistook the rings for a star on each side of the planet. What would have been his amazement if he had seen it with this glass! Well, we will shut up for to-night. Mamma will be furious."

But when they returned to the drawing-room they found Mrs. Meredith dozing over a book, and she was by no means angry.

Vera went to bed that night with her thoughts in other worlds. What she had seen had been a revelation such as she had never dreamed of, but she was brought rudely back to earth in the morning.

As they took their places at the breakfast-table, Mrs. Meredith passed a letter she had received over to her brother.

"A note from Lady Seagrove," she said. "She has heard of our arrival and wants us to dine there on Thursday. We must ask her to let us bring Miss Fane."

A strange thrill passed through Vera's heart.

"Who did you say?" she asked.

"Lady Seagrove," answered Bates. "The Seagroves are our nearest neighbours. By the way, that Mr. Colborne who coached you for the theatricals is their son. You will be interested in making their acquaintance."

*(To be continued.)*

## A DAY ON THE SPLEUCHAN.

BY CAPT. THE HON. R. C. DRUMMOND.

"YOU are just as likely," said the General—"just as likely to catch a shark."

"Quite so; by shark meaning bull-trout," observed Willie Maclean.

"They are rather shark-like in their habits," added John.

"I don't want to damp your ardour," continued the General, "or to hinder you from wetting a line, but with the river in its present condition, you might flog for a week without stirring a fin. You young fellows are always so sanguine. You seem to forget there has been no rain for six weeks. At its best the river is but a small one, and as for killing a salmon in it now—I tell you it is impossible; by fair means that is. No doubt you will catch some sea-trout, but nothing much over a pound."

The General relit his cigar, which had gone out during this speech, and settled himself more comfortably in a roomy arm-chair. He wore the kilt, and his red and white stockings brought into relief the deep tan of his knees, acquired in many a day's exposure to the sun and wind.

"What will the General bet that John and I don't bring back a fish to-morrow?" inquired Willie.

"I seldom bet, still I don't mind staking a box of cigars against your impossible salmon. But you must fish fair. No stroke-hauling with leaded phantoms, or snatching with treble hooks at the point of the rod, and no worming. Your fish must be killed with the fly and I shall have much pleasure in eating him—when you catch him. Now good-night."

The master of the house lit a candle and strode off to bed, leaving his guests to discuss their plans for the morrow. Neither of them had thrown a line for many weary months, which had been passed in smoky London, and by the time they retired for the night it was not one salmon but half a dozen that would content them.

On the following morning the sun poured its rays from a cloudless sky. Not a breath of wind stirred the tall fuschias in front of the house, and the loch, where it lay below embosomed in mountains, was calm as a mirror. Although it was now mid-August the grouse on the neighbouring moors had not yet been disturbed. The birds are often late in the West Highlands, and at Spleuchan Lodge, which was situated near the coast, shooting seldom commenced before the 20th.

Thus it came about that the General's guests were bent on killing a "fush."

"Grand day for fishing," observed their host at breakfast, making strong play meantime with some cold salmon. "They always take best here in bright sunshine and low water. This fellow was caught in the nets, but now we shall rely on your rods."

"Don't be so sarcastic, General," answered Willie. "They say the unexpected always happens, and you may yet have to part with those cigars."

John Henderson said nothing. He knew the river, which his friend did not, and the salmon which had seemed so easy of capture overnight had now receded in his mind to hopeless odds.

"I am sure," observed their hostess, "John will get a salmon if it is possible for any one to do so. I think he must have a secret understanding with the fish, for he catches them when every one else fails."

"Many thanks for your good opinion," said Henderson, walking round the table to replenish his coffee cup.

"You had far better come with us in the yacht," remarked the General's youngest daughter, a pretty girl with dark hair and eyes. "The islands outside will look lovely to-day, and there is not the smallest chance of your catching a salmon."

"Time will show," answered Willie sententiously. "We shall be most happy to join you in the yacht on a future occasion. To-day our credit is at stake."

"That's right!" exclaimed the General. "I like to see young fellows keen, whether at fishing or fox-hunting."

Duly equipped with rods and tackle, landing-net and gaff, the forlorn hope of two foregathered in the hall, where their host joined them. He intended to take a turn on the hill, to spy for deer, but carried no rifle, as the red deer were late that year and as yet the stags were scarcely in condition. Six foot four inches in his stockings, and still perfectly erect, notwithstanding his sixty years, the General looked very like work in his kilt and coat of grey check homespun. A spy-glass in a well-worn leather case hung over his shoulder. The heat of the day had induced him to discard a waistcoat, and he wore no sporan, a part of the Highland dress which, since pockets came in fashion, is rather ornamental than useful, and decidedly an encumbrance on the hill.

"I admire your pluck," he observed, "but am doubtful of your judgment. However, no doubt you will catch some sea-trout, and I hope you will have a pleasant day. To-night I will tell you what brand of cigars I prefer, and where to order them. No poaching, remember!"

"You really insult us by these suspicions," replied John, sadly. "As if either of us knew *how* to poach!"

At sight of the celebrated Spleuchan Willie Maclean was greatly

taken aback; even John, who had a better idea what was in store for them was rather surprised. He had never seen it so low. There were indeed deep pools at somewhat distant intervals, but a mere trickle of water flowed into them, and in many parts of its course the salmon river was no bigger than a burn. The sun beat strong on the water and the blue current danced and sparkled in its rays; decidedly the conditions were unfavourable to the capture of salmon with rod and line. However, both our heroes were keen hands and good fishermen, John Henderson especially so; moreover he had plenty of experience in the ways of West country salmon.

The rods were soon ready and Willie put up a small Black Doctor, a fly to which he pinned his faith when waters ran low.

"No use fishing with that," observed Henderson, "our only chance is to use trout-flies and fine tackle. The mere sight of that fly of yours would give every salmon in the pool indigestion for the remainder of the day."

They commenced operations at a bridge, below which, as so often happens, was a fairly good pool where salmon usually lay, although they seldom took unless the river was in proper trim. John Henderson led the way in virtue of his better acquaintance with the Spleuchan. His methods certainly would have surprised salmon-fishers accustomed to the broad waters of Dee, Tay, or Tweed. Keeping well back from the edge of the stream and crouching low, as though stalking the wary trout on the slow-moving Test, or classic Itchen, he sent the line on its deceptive errand, down and across the pool. Well-skilled was John in handling the fly rod. At each cast the quivering line shot straight across the current, hovered over it for a second, then the tiny fly settled on the water light as thistle down. "Fine work," mused Willie, "but not much like salmon-fishing." At the tail of the pool a smart rise came in mid-current, where it quickened speed towards the rapid below, and immediately a silvery sea-trout was leaping high out of the water, while the angler dropped the point of his rod.

"Three quarters of a pound," said Maclean presently, removing the fish from the hook of the steelyard; "and bright as a new shilling. Not so bad for a start."

The two friends worked down-stream with varying success. Now one, now another, landed a sea-trout, but no sign of a salmon rewarded their efforts. Towards the middle of the day they came to a bend in the river where a broad, deep pool was over-hung by an oak tree. No shelter intervened between it and the restless Atlantic, and its gnarled and weather-worn limbs bore witness to the centuries, during which it had defied the fierce gales which swept in from the west. Here a brace of half-pound sea-trout were added to the bag, after which the spoil was counted out and found to consist of eight sea-trout, whereof the largest might be a trifle over a pound in weight.

Having demolished their sandwiches and despatched a "wee drappie" of good Scotch whiskey to aid digestion, they lay idly on the mossy turf watching the blue smoke from their pipes as it curled slowly aloft.

"Seems as if the General's judgment was likely to prove correct," observed Willie.

"He ought to have laid us ten boxes of cigars to one," replied his friend.

The sound of a stealthy rise came from the pool below. "That was a good fish," said John. "Not a sea-trout if I am any judge, and whatever it was it meant taking."

Watching the pool they noticed that now and again a good-sized fly, of sober colouring, fluttered from the oak tree, to alight for a second on the surface of the water. Presently a large swirl came in the centre of the current and a broad silvery side glanced in the sunlight.

"A salmon!" exclaimed Willie, "and as likely a rise as one would wish to see. Let us try it at once while it is in the humour."

Receiving no reply he looked round and saw Henderson, landing-net in hand, creeping on hands and knees along the bank. By a dexterous twirl of the net several of the flies they had noticed were entangled in its meshes, and a solitary specimen was safely captured by hand. After a careful search through the fly-book a good imitation of the natural fly was discovered, and presently all was ready for the important attempt. It was decided that Henderson should take the cast, while his companion watched proceedings from a limb of the oak-tree, whence every corner of the pool could be observed. Willie accordingly stepped gingerly along the slippery branches, while Henderson changed his fine cast for tackle better suited to the work in hand. A curious sight revealed itself to the former from his coign of vantage on the oak-tree. The pool beneath him simply swarmed with sea-trout. There were two distinct shoals, whereof one might contain a hundred to a hundred and fifty fish, averaging from half a pound to a couple of pounds in weight, while in the other Willie counted upwards of forty sea-trout of somewhat larger size; he guessed the biggest to weigh about four pounds. They were all lying quietly rather low down in the pool, where the water was about four feet deep. From time to time one of the smaller fish forged ahead, and turning slightly over its silvery scales gleamed white in the brilliant sunshine. Clearly the sea-trout were not feeding, for they took no notice of the numerous flies which hovered over the water, ever and anon alighting on its surface, then winging their flight aloft unharmed. For some time Willie searched in vain for the salmon whose presence was suspected. At length he distinguished two dark forms lying side by side at the head of the pool, just clear of the main current, and coming to the conclusion, after a careful scrutiny, that the fish were grilse or small salmon, he reported the result of his observations to his friend on the bank.



Commencing in the thin water above the pool and letting out the line gradually, John worked his way down foot by foot. He was screened from observation by the bank in rear and by the shadow of the trees which grew upon it.

"I can distinguish every knot in the casting line!" called Maclean from the oak-tree; "surely no fish in its senses will look at the fly in such clear water. However, we shall soon know; the next cast should be over them."

Moving down a step Henderson sent the line lightly over the pool, his nerves totally unmoved by the unusual circumstances of the case.

"More to the right!" shouted Willie. "You pulled away the fly too soon. Give it more time in the slack water. There goes one of them—straight at the fly with its mouth open! Refused it at the last moment!" he continued in a disgusted tone, as the fish turned tail at the surface and sank quietly down to its companion. Great was his delight on looking towards the angler to see, from the bending rod that the fish was hooked. So deliberate and quiet had been its movements that his eye had failed to mark the process of annexing the fly.

For some minutes he watched the progress of the struggle from the oak-tree. For a time the grilse cruised slowly about the pool, shaking its head savagely from side to side, and Willie was greatly interested in observing the movements of its companion. It followed the other about the pool as though anxious to learn the cause of its strange conduct, and when the hooked fish came to a halt its friend lay quietly by its side, possibly with the design of affording moral support by its presence.

At length the grilse seemed to become alive to its danger. It made a rapid dart down stream, passing fair under Willie's feet, the sea-trout scattering to either side as it rushed through their midst; then quietly regaining their former stations as though the matter did not concern them. At the tail of the pool the grilse jumped high out of the water; presently John had it well under control, and Willie hastened ashore to do the needful with the gaff.

In a few minutes the fish was safely landed, and being weighed, drew the steelyard down to five and three-quarter pounds; though not clean-run, it had not been long in fresh water and was in capital condition. Great were the rejoicings of the two friends, and having duly drunk the health of their capture, it occurred to them there was no reason why the other grilse should not share the fate of its comrade. On this occasion the rod was entrusted to Willie Maclean, and surveying the pool from the oak-tree, John discovered the surviving grilse lying in its original position. The chance of capturing it did not appear very hopeful. The sun was now almost vertically overhead and no cloud obscured its brilliance. One would suppose that even a salmon, however limited its intelligence, would



have its suspicions aroused by previous events and take warning from the fate of its comrade.

Guided by the directions of his friend in the tree, Willie presented the fly in excellent style, and the moment the unlucky grilse sighted the dainty morsel it swam forward, only to find, alas, that the seeming insect carried death in its tail. The fish made a good struggle, but before long young Maclean was master of the situation, and John wielding the gaff with his accustomed skill, grilse number two was safely removed from its natural element. It weighed a trifle more than its fellow, and the silvery pair lying side by side on the green turf made a very pretty show. The insect that had brought about so singular a capture was thenceforward known as the "oak fly." The title may or may not be scientifically accurate, but so it was called on the Spleuchan, and since that day the pattern has accounted for many fish on that sporting little river.

When the two friends took down their rods and directed their steps homewards their bags contained two grilse and seventeen sea-trout, and the reader will surely agree that, in the circumstances, they had every reason to feel gratified with the result of their labours. The surprise of the General when he heard the good news may be imagined. Never before had he known his river to yield a fish in similar conditions of weather and water, and it was some little time before he could be persuaded that the grilse had been honestly come by. After this somewhat lucky exploit the fame of Messrs. Henderson and Maclean as skilful anglers spread far and wide, and we may suppose that their host was not unwilling to discharge his debt of cigars.

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# ACCORDING TO HER FOLLY.

A DREARY November evening in a London suburb, a drizzling rain, a general impression of murkiness overhead and sloppiness underfoot. The sort of evening to set pessimistic philosophers moralising over the miseries of life, and to suggest to ordinary commonplace Britishers the prospective delights of a warm room and a comforting dinner. Little Mrs. Simpson, walking quickly from the station to her suburban home, belongs to the former category, or thinks she does, which is nearly the same thing. Little Mrs. Simpson is an unhappy woman, a wronged and persecuted wife, a *femme incomprise* of the most unmistakable order. To quote her own touching words in a recent outpouring of her heart to a bosom friend, she is, though apparently surrounded by relations and friends, in reality isolated and alone. The world credits her with an indulgent and devoted husband, while in truth she is fettered to a being incapable of sympathising with one single aspiration of her soul. She is linked to a nature which grovels constantly in the mire of sordid money-getting, and the slough of mere animal pleasures (this is a free paraphrase of John Simpson's daily round in the City, and of what Hetty calls his "gross sensuous enjoyment" of his evening meal), while her finer spirit strives in vain after the delights of a refined asceticism and a pure spirituality. As she remarked plaintively to the like-minded friend who had listened to the above lamentation, "how can one find anything like spiritual union with a husband who begins the day by seizing upon the money article of the *Times*, and ends it by eating a heavy dinner and subsiding into his arm-chair and a pipe; who prefers a comic opera to Wagner's music, and Dickens's novels to the works of George Meredith; who goes to church quite as a matter of course, and never spends a thought on the problems of the universe, nor attempts to fathom the mysteries of the Unknowable—in a word, a man who is entirely and utterly commonplace!"

The friend sighed sympathetically.

"My poor Hester," she said pityingly, "it is just the commonplace which is the curse of our age and generation. Against that leaden barrier of dulness and conventionality the aspiring spirit beats its wings in vain. Happy any fate which would release you from the fetters of this marriage which is degrading all your best faculties and noblest aspirations."

Hetty felt a little startled by this suggestion.

"I am sure I don't want anything to happen to John," she murmured. Then, with a little compunction, "He is very fond of me,

poor fellow, and we used to get along very well together before—before——”

“Before your eyes were opened to the true meaning of existence,” interrupted Miss Derwent severely. “Before you realised that the Spiritual Life can only be obtained by the steady trampling down of all worldly motives and sensuous enjoyments, of all natural affection—so called—and all self-indulgent desires. Before, in fact, you had seen in Eustace St. Clare the ideal of spiritualised humanity!”

Hetty coloured slightly.

“Think,” continued the disciple of the New Philosophy, with what in a less spiritually-minded mortal might possibly have been called a faint touch of malice; “think what your life might have been had Fate placed you at *his* side! You will never attain to a higher level while you are burdened by the wretchedness of this uncongenial marriage. I have heard St. Clare say so.”

“It is very easy for you to talk like this, Theresa,” returned Hetty a little pettishly, “but what *can* I do? I am married, and there’s an end of it.”

“Yes, dear,” answered her friend with exceeding sweetness, “that is why I am so sorry for you. As you say, you are helpless.”

It is of this conversation, and of Eustace St. Clare, that Hetty is thinking as she returns to her home, from which she has been absent a week or two during her visit to a friend. St. Clare is the High Priest, so to speak, of the occult theosophy—or rather his own somewhat arbitrary and fantastic adaptation thereof—into which Hetty and a select circle of acquaintances have lately been initiated. He is a gifted creature with “dark luminous eyes,” a marvellous capacity for dispensing with food and sleep, and, to quote one enthusiastic admirer, “a soul so instinct with spiritual life that it glows through the frail tenement of flesh.” He can discourse for hours at a stretch on the relations between the Seen and the Unseen, and recount dreams and visions which quite throw into the shade those of the sainted Buddha, whom he usually speaks of as “my Master.” He lays down a scheme of life of such ascetic simplicity that, as an irreverent critic remarked, it almost resolves itself into a handful of rice and perpetual meditation. But perhaps the most distinctive charm of his creed is the fact that it is capable of endless modifications according to the revelations received by those of its votaries who are fortunate enough to succeed in working themselves into a sort of non-alcoholic delirium—or “sacred frenzy,” as they prefer to call it.

St. Clare presents indeed at all points a decided contrast to Hetty’s husband, tall, broad-shouldered John Simpson, whose blue eyes are more distinguished by frank simplicity than by intellectual fire, who obstinately rejects all his wife’s attempts to teach him the mysteries of her newly-acquired esoteric faith, declares he has no desire to anticipate the sensations of a disembodied spirit, and has even allowed

himself to remark of the High Priest that he looks "a lantern-jawed unwholesome kind of beggar, a cross between a prig and a lunatic." Hetty shudders as she recalls this blasphemous utterance. Can it possibly be her duty to endure such insensate dulness of perception, such utter blindness to the higher aims of existence? She hardly thinks so. And in truth her new philosophy acknowledges but few duties, and those chiefly to one's own soul—other people's souls or bodies being regarded as an irrelevant consideration.

"I wish poor John no harm," is her pitying conclusion, "but oh, if I were only as free as Theresa Derwent—free to shape out my life for myself, and make it an embodiment of what life might be—that union of ascetic simplicity and lofty ideals that *he* described so eloquently yesterday. Ah, I feel sure he glanced at me when he said there were some that no poverty would daunt and no self-denial repel. How he understands my unuttered longings! If only——"

Then her mind reverts to more commonplace grievances. Why has John not met her at the station, as she had desired him to do in her post-card last night? It is really most unpardonable of him to leave her to walk by herself, and also most unusual neglect on his part. He cannot be away or ill, for she had a note from him this morning. And, by-the-way, what was it that he said?—"You will not find things quite as you left them. I am sure you will rejoice that the light has come." The light! What light? On the lips of Eustace St. Clare how much the sentence might mean! But, as Hetty reminds herself, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, John Simpson is incapable of the language of metaphor. If he says "light," he is probably talking of his pet fad of illuminating his house by electricity—perhaps during her absence he has had the electric light installed as a pleasant surprise for her. John, poor fellow, is so blundering in his attempts to give pleasure. As though that kind of thing could possibly promote her happiness!

By this time she has turned into the little drive which leads to her home, a large handsome house standing by itself in what London suburbs regard as rather a large garden. She notices with surprise that the front of the building seems dark; even the hall windows show no light. What can the servants be thinking of? She rings and knocks with indignant emphasis. Not the slightest result is produced! She repeats the process with added vigour, and still without effect!

After ten minutes of futile endeavour, Mrs. Simpson becomes almost as frankly out of temper as if she had never been taught the absolute triviality of all things pertaining to the visible and tangible. Vowing summary vengeance on the culprits, she passes round to the back of the house, equally unlighted, and begins an exhaustive search for an unfastened door or window.

At last, a latched door yields to her touch, and she gropes her way through the back premises with a curious sense of being in a strange

place. The perfect silence, the darkness, and a vague impression of unfamiliar emptiness around begin to frighten her. She has passed the swing-door into the hall, and still the same utter darkness. The shutters must certainly be closed, or a little light would penetrate from without. Suddenly she remembers that she has a little fancy box of wax matches in her pocket. Inspiring thought! She can light the gas jet over her head.

The next instant she utters a little shriek of consternation. What has happened to the place? Her entrance hall was a triumph of decoration, and not so very long ago the pride of her heart. For Hetty's short married life has already seen her in several phases, and art was the special enthusiasm which preceded philosophy. Where are the ferns, the brackets, the *portières*, the bamboos and bulrushes, the artistic "corners" and delicate statuettes? The place has been stripped! No trace remains of all the dainty prettiness save the marks on the wall-paper from which the pictures have been removed. The dining-room door stands open. It also has been despoiled of every article of beauty and luxury. It contains merely the table, without cover, half a dozen plain wooden chairs, apparently imported from the kitchen, and the side-board, on which stands a large carafe of water, some tumblers of particularly stout glass, and two heaped-up salad bowls—the one containing apparently boiled rice, and the other some messy compound, suggesting to Hetty's uninitiated eyes the idea of cold bread poultice.

In a sort of dazed bewilderment she turns away and moves nervously towards the uncarpeted staircase, which she ascends cautiously, clutching her match-box tightly, as one holding on to a last anchor of safety. The landing above is in darkness, and, as her footfall assures her, has been denuded of carpet and rugs; but a few steps bring her to the door of her own room. Here also she can light a gas jet, and then she stands staring about her in a stupefaction of amazement and horror. Her pretty luxurious room has not only been plundered of all its comforts and beauties—it has actually been rearranged—evidently with design—into what strikes Hetty as a pretty faithful similitude of a prison cell. A small iron bedstead, the simplest necessities of the toilet, a bare floor, uncurtained windows. Even the wall-paper has been stripped off, and—crowning indignity—the walls have absolutely been white-washed! The only article she recognises is her book-case, and that is now filled entirely with books of a mystically religious and philosophical character.

Feeling almost stunned, she drops into a chair—nay, *the* chair, and that a hard Windsor one—and literally pinches her arm to assure herself that she is not dreaming. Or—with a sudden thrill of hope—can she possibly have wandered into the wrong house? No; the dwelling is unmistakably her own. Can wholesale burglary be

the explanation of its despoiled condition? But its perfect order and cleanliness are a sufficient answer. Besides, burglars are contented with stealing other people's property, and do not proceed to arrange amateur hermit cells for their victims.

A candle in a tin candlestick stands on the deal table before her. She snatches it up, and lighting it, determines to pursue her investigations till she unravels the mystery.

But though she searches all over the upper part of the house she can discover no elucidation. Two other bedrooms are prepared like her own, the rest are perfectly empty—swept, but certainly not garnished. The sitting-rooms have all been cleared out with the exception of the library, where, though the bookshelves are still filled, and writing materials on the table, the carpet, curtains, and easy chairs are conspicuous by their absence. Has some madman or fanatic been at work? And oh, *where* is John?

By this time Hetty is thoroughly frightened. Cold, hunger, and loneliness, to all of which she is a stranger, combined with the darkness of the great empty house, and the oppressive sense of mystery, have nearly deprived her of the small amount of courage she possesses. She shrinks from the sound of her own footfall echoing on the uncovered floors, and starts violently at every fresh shadow cast by the flickering light she carries.

Suddenly the sound of music strikes her ear—a soft, plaintive melody which wails through the empty house with a sound of indescribable melody, and in the overwrought tension of her nerves sends the tears rushing to her eyes. Someone is playing the violin, and playing it with rare skill. For a moment she stands listening, and almost forgetting her circumstances. Then she realises that the sound is coming from a part of the house she has not yet explored—a long, low room built out at one side, and generally used as a smoking-room. Has she found the heart of the mystery at last? And has she the courage to go forward and meet it?

For fully five minutes she hesitates irresolutely, while the plaintive strain swells and ebbs and finally sobs itself away. Then she braces up her courage by the reflection that at any rate the violin-player is not likely to be a burglar, a coiner, or a tipsy man—Hetty's three pet terrors—and determines to advance. Saying to herself boldly that after all she is in her own house, she nevertheless walks down the passage as quietly as her high-heeled boots will permit, and timidly opens the door.

For a moment she fancies that the room is empty, and looks round with considerable curiosity. It is distinctly less uncomfortable than the rest of the house, and it seems to have been elaborately Orientalised. Queer carvings, grotesque images, and Eastern-looking hangings abound, and the general effect reminds Hetty of some kind of temple or mosque—or rather the stage representation of such. Then, as her eye travels round the divan, she recoils with a sudden



start, for there rises from it the figure of a man clad in a loose garment of some Indian fabric. The next instant she has darted forward, exclaiming in a shrill crescendo of mingled relief and denunciation:

"John! John!"

John it is, not apparently, in spite of his impressive Eastern garb, quite so successfully transmogrified as his apartment; for he flushes nervously under her scrutiny, and his blue eyes meet hers with an embarrassment which does not escape her notice.

Little Mrs. Simpson feels herself again mistress of the situation.

"John," she begins magisterially, drawing up her slight figure to its full and impressive height of five feet four, "John, what is the meaning of all this?"

"All what?" asks Mr. Simpson rather feebly.

Hetty feels that she does well to be angry.

"Answer me!" she cries indignantly, with a stamp of her pretty foot and an annihilating flash from her hazel eyes. "What have you been doing to the house? What has come over you? Have you gone out of your mind, or what?"

"On the contrary, I have come to my right mind, and—as I understand you—to yours also," answers Mr. Simpson more firmly. "I have decided that you are right in your views, and have determined to shape my life—our lives—accordingly."

"What have my views got to do with this—this——"

"Abnegation," completes Mr. Simpson placidly. "Well, you always told me that we lived too grossly and selfishly, and lost sight of the—er—the higher life; and that you yearned for the life of meditation and soul-culture, though it were pursued in the loneliness of a desert on a diet of water and herbs, so as not to allow the—er—the flesh to obscure the spirit. Well, it struck me that we could do all that without going to a desert—a sort of 'plain living and high thinking' carried to—to an extreme; and I have arranged it all so. Now we can be as ascetic and self-abnegating as any Hindoo devotee; in fact, we must be so, for I've given up everything."

"Given up what?" gasps Hetty.

"Well, the—the dross of wealth, you know—all my—er—my income, in fact," explains her husband. "I've kept enough for the real necessities of life," he adds soothingly, "this house to live in, and about sixty pounds a year besides."

Hetty collapses into a chair.

"Sixty pounds a year!" she falters, looking down involuntarily at her pretty fur-trimmed costume of brown plush, her dainty boots, her perfect gloves.

John observes the glance.

"The followers of the sainted Buddha," he remarks, "clothed themselves, I believe, in a simple cotton garment, grown yellow from—er—want of washing; but in this climate I should think the



necessary simplicity might be attained by a plain gown of black serge, which would not show the—er—the dirt, in fact."

"You can't be serious!" cries Hetty indignantly. "The whole thing is perfectly monstrous. At any rate, you will never get *my* consent. I will not be dragged into poverty by your mad folly."

"But your consent is—excuse me—quite superfluous. The transaction is already complete, and it is entirely with my own property that I have been dealing."

His tone is gentle and courteous enough; but he looks straight into her eyes with a certain significance as he speaks, and Hetty is conscious of a kind of mental douche of cold water. Yes; John Simpson has been abundantly kind and generous to pretty, penniless Hester Dalton, and has been repaid by little of gratitude or consideration. It is the first time he has reminded her of either fact.

She bursts into tears.

"I can't think how you can be so cruel and unkind," she sobs plaintively. "You see I am tired, and cold, and worn out, and you do nothing to help me."

This is, Hetty knows, just the kind of appeal to move John, whose sympathy is ever of the practical sort. To her intense surprise he merely answers, after a pause, she fancies, of irresolution, "If you are tired you had better seek rest. But are you aware that physical discomfort is frequently a discipline for the better detachment of the soul from the clogging fetters of the body?"

Hetty *is* aware—theoretically. She listened admiringly to the sentiment only yesterday evening. But somehow, heard then in a warm luxurious drawing-room after a pleasant dinner-party, it sounded decidedly more attractive than now.

"Can't I?" she asks irrelevantly, and this time with a very genuine pathos in her voice, "can't I have a cup of tea?"

She looks very pretty and child-like as she pushes the brown hair back from her forehead and looks appealingly up at him; and perhaps she knows it.

But John Simpson remains apparently adamant, save for a slight twitching at the mouth, which might be due to various contradictory emotions. She thinks his voice unnecessarily gruff as he answers:

"All stimulants, I find, are interdicted to those aiming at the Higher Life. Tea, by its over-excitation of the nervous system, is no less harmful than alcohol in disturbing the repose of the soul. Besides, self-abnegation is the chief virtue of our cult. The simplest grains of the earth, a harmless and non-exciting pulse—you may have noticed it prepared for our use?"

With a shudder of disgust Hetty remembers the cold poultice she has observed.

"Oh, John!" she exclaims entreatingly, "I can't live like that! I should die! You know I am not strong enough!"—a quite fictitious delicacy of constitution has hitherto been Hetty's most

effective weapon in getting her own way—"Give up this dreadful idea! Don't be so cruel to your poor little wife!"

She rises as she speaks and moves towards him, her hands stretched out imploringly, her face upturned to his, prepared at the slightest encouragement to throw herself into his arms and be soothed and caressed into calmness.

To her unspeakable amazement her husband steps back out of reach of her clinging arms, and with a repellent gesture says huskily but determinedly:

"No; don't do that!"

To say that Hetty is shocked is but inadequately to express her feelings. An earthquake opening at her feet would have astonished her less. John absolutely refusing her proffered caresses! John, always so ready to accept her most careless demonstration of affection, almost annoying her by the tame uniformity of his never-failing tenderness! A magnet unexpectedly repelled by the object of its attraction would possibly experience something of the sensations of Mrs. Simpson at this moment.

"Don't do that? Why not?" she gasps limply.

But Mr. Simpson has turned away, and his muttered reply is inaudible. Something incoherent about the suppression of carnal affections and earthly emotions is all that reaches her bewildered ears. After a minute's pause he adds more confidently:

"Our aspirations aim at a less individualised affection—a love more spiritual and all-embracing."

All the latent common-sense which Hetty possesses blazes into revolt.

"That is utter absurdity and nonsense!" she cries indignantly.

"It can hardly be that," retorts her husband, turning upon her a little sharply. "For I quote the sentiment from your oracle, Mr. St. Clare, and you repeated it not a week ago with expressions of admiration."

Mrs. Simpson is slightly taken aback. So John really listened to her chatter when she believed him half asleep and as uncomprehending as unsympathetic. She had scarcely given him credit for sufficient intelligence to take in her not very lucidly expounded theories, much less to remember and act upon them in this disconcerting manner.

"Well, I don't care who said it," she answers defiantly, deserting her standard with enviable feminine facility. "It is nonsense all the same. How can the love of husband and wife be all-embracing, I should like to know?"

At this home thrust Mr. Simpson hesitates for a moment; then, endeavouring to regard the ceiling with an appearance of unembarrassed ease, he answers slowly:

"Well, you see, such a—a relationship—is not—was not—er—contemplated by our society."

"What *is* your society?" exclaims Hetty with pardonable indignation.

"The society for the practical carrying out of the new ethics," answers John glibly.

"I never heard of such a society."

"Probably not; I should imagine that your attention has been rather devoted to theories than to—to practice of any kind," suggests Mr. Simpson meekly.

With a rapid review of the past few months flashing through her mind, Hetty inwardly admits the truth of this criticism. Naturally she does not say so.

"How did you hear of this society? Who persuaded you to join it? Somebody must have talked you into it!" she exclaims vehemently.

"Yes; someone did persuade me," admits her husband, glancing rather nervously, she fancies, towards a heavy *portière* which shuts off the room from a small conservatory beyond.

"Who was he?"

"It was she," answers John calmly. "It was one of the Founders of our Order, the Vestal Ayesha."

As he speaks, the curtains are pushed aside, and a woman comes forward into the room—a woman of rare beauty, as Hetty perceives even at her first startled glance in the rather dim light. She is tall and slight and extremely graceful, and she wears a simple gown of dead white material falling in soft clinging folds to her feet. Her eyes are dark and dreamy, but her hair is a rich auburn, which, piled in heavy masses on her finely poised head, contrasts weirdly with the sombre eyes, creamy pale complexion, and scarlet lips. She holds the bow of a violin in one hand, and advances with a languid self-possession which Hetty is far from being able to emulate.

"Who is this?" she gasps, in angry bewilderment.

It is the fair stranger who answers. John has discreetly withdrawn a few paces into the background.

"I am Ayesha," she answers sweetly, gazing placidly down at Hetty as though the word had conveyed a whole volume of explanation.

"And—what—what are you doing here?" For the life of her, Hetty cannot frame the phrase less bluntly.

"I am Ayesha," repeats the stranger in the same explanatory tone. Then she adds blandly, half extending one long white hand towards Hetty, "In you I am pleased to hail another disciple—a possible votaress of our Order."

Hetty feels her colour rise, and her curly hair nearly bristle with indignation. The Philistine instincts of the British matron overcome all her recently acquired views of social ethics.

"Do I understand, John," she inquires, with an awful dignity, "that this—this lady has been staying here in my absence?"

"Surely," answers Ayesha gently, silencing with a gesture the too impulsive John, who has opened his lips to reply. "Surely! For even so it is decreed in our Regulations. With the newly admitted probationer must abide for a time one of the duly received of our Order. She inspires him with fortitude, she supports his resolutions, she weans him from the world, and by sweet communion of soul with soul, she——"

Hetty interrupts this catalogue by jumping to her feet with an impetuosity which almost startles the placid-mannered vestal.

"I don't want to hear what else she does, thank you. Do you intend to go on staying here?"

"Surely," answers Ayesha again, with the same bland affirmation. "I stay here so long as I am necessary to my neophyte," indicating with a patronising gesture the six-foot John towering behind her. Then, after a moment's pause, she adds, with a smile of encouraging condescension, "But you also need not despair of ultimate admission to our Order. You are, I learn, already deeply imbued with the principles of our cult. Their practical observance would soon follow. We have no wish to exclude you from amongst us, have we, beloved?"—to John, who at the epithet, and the tender look which accompanies it, becomes almost as vivid a colour as his wife's crimson flush of indignation. John Simpson is decidedly not, as yet, fully habituated to the social tone of his new environment.

Hetty's cup is full. Worse than the endearing term is that "we" with which this audacious intruder associates herself with John in a kind of union from which she, his lawful wife—yes, Hetty is actually guilty of falling back on this hopelessly Philistine and conventional expression!—is excluded. Very "individualistic" are Hetty's views at this moment.

"Then I forbid it!" she cries emphatically, standing very upright with her little head well up, and one tiny foot planted firmly forward, in the attitude of FitzJames confronting Roderick Dhu. "I forbid you to remain here! This is my house—at any rate, I am mistress here. And this is my husband—*mine*! And no one has a right to come between us."

A gallery of the British "gods," with their well-known theoretic delight in the domestic virtues, would certainly receive this sentiment with wild applause. The exponent of the New Ethics smiles a pitying smile, and murmurs gently:

"What undisciplined impetuosity! How far removed from the calm of genuine altruistic affection! My poor child, your—your regard for your husband is little better than a selfish hedonism. *We* use no such words as '*mine*' and '*thine*.'"

"It doesn't in the least matter what words you use," retorts Mrs. Simpson, with usual tenacity in sticking to the point. "Are you going to leave this house or not?"

She has thrown off her hat and cloak, and she makes a pretty

picture as she stands there—her soft brown hair ruffled on her forehead, her cheeks flushed, and her hazel eyes sparkling and bright through a glimmer of unshed tears. Her defiant attitude, contrasting with the languid calm and lithe gracefulness of her opponent, give her somewhat of the appearance of a pugnacious kitten spiritedly offering battle to a half-roused panther.

"I am going to remain," is Ayesha's softly spoken but sufficiently explicit reply.

Hetty turns to her husband.

"John," she says resolutely, though there is a slight shake in her voice—"John, if this woman stays in your house, I shall leave it." She honestly believes that this announcement will strike with the explosive force of a bombshell.

John Simpson is silent. He evades her glance, and there is a certain amount of irresolution and nervousness in his expression, but hardly any surprise and certainly no protest.

"Let me suggest, dear friend," begins Ayesha, gliding towards him. But Hetty with sudden passion throws herself between them, exclaiming:

"Stand back, you white snake! I spoke to my husband, and I will have my answer from him!"

For an instant her husband's eyes meet hers, and she fancies she reads in them the affectionate admiration she is wont to see there. He takes a step towards her, and half extends his hands; but the next moment his glance encounters the dark eyes of Ayesha. He lets his arms fall and turns away.

"Answer me, John!" implores Hetty huskily.

"Speak, beloved!" prompts Ayesha's soft voice.

Thus adjured, John clears his throat two or three times, then turning his face, though not his eyes, towards his wife, answers hoarsely:

"Perhaps it—it will be—better so."

As the words pass his lips, Hetty feels an uncontrollable lump rise in her throat. If she stays another moment she shall break down into a paroxysm of sobbing. She turns abruptly and darts towards the door—yet not so quickly but that she hears Ayesha's approving murmur.

"And the spiritual communion of two alone is ever more profitable. I have always counselled it."

This seems merely a slightly paraphrased way of expressing the trite opinion that "two are company and three are none." But Hetty is too completely overwhelmed and wretched for her sense of humour to be touched.

Almost instinctively she makes blindly for the shelter of her own room. Bare and despoiled as it is, it is at least a haven of refuge from her tormentor. Here she can, at least, cry out her heart unobserved. And cry she does, lying prone on the little hard bed

in the dark and loneliness, sobbing with an hysterical passion which she has never experienced in her life before. With all her vagaries, Hetty is innately kind-hearted, and her sunny good nature atones to most people for her many aberrations of judgment. But then she has never been made to writhe as she does now under the bitter sense of a wrong she is powerless to redress. More even than by sorrow, her soul is possessed by an overpowering rage and anger—all the more vindictive because so impotent.

Lying there in the dark with her face hidden in the pillow, she clenches her little white hands, and actually grinds her pearly teeth, as she realises again the sense of helplessness which comes over her in the presence of that smooth-tongued self-possessed intruder. She has been robbed of a possession she scarcely valued—chiefly because of the very security of that possession. John had always worshipped her—how could she imagine that he would change? She had never conceived that any neglect or careless indifference on her part could alter *his* affection. He has always been so stolid! One would as soon have expected the church-tower to alter its shape as John to take up new lines. And now her ascendancy over him is swept away. The influence which ought to be hers—which *was* hers—is usurped by that intriguing woman with the soft voice. What shall she do? Carry out her threat and leave him? Never! That last speech of the "Vestal" has settled that! Cost what it may, she shall *not* be left to undisturbed "communion" with Hetty's husband.

And as the thought passes through her mind Hetty sits up and dashes the tears from her eyes. Her husband! Her very own! Not a prophet to revolve around with a host of other feminine satellites in sentimental adoration—or as they prefer to call it, "intellectual appreciation." It is extraordinary how insignificant and far-off seems now her infatuation for Eustace St. Clare. Was it really only to-day that she was allowing herself to think—yes, even to speak disloyally of John because of his unlikeness to that bombastic windbag? In the revulsion of her feelings Hetty is inclined to be more than merciless to St. Clare's little pretensions. How could she compare them—John, who has loved her with a devotion so patient, so tender, and so forbearing; St. Clare, who has languidly encouraged her sentimental admiration as incense to his overweening vanity? Has she risked her most precious possession against an idle toy—and lost it?

But it cannot yet be too late. After all she is John's wife, she and no other. Perhaps, if she has patience, John may tire of the fanatical scheme he has taken up under the influence of this designing woman. Not for a moment does it occur to Hetty to give her enemy credit for the least sincerity of purpose with regard to the theories she has herself been coquetting with for months. And if not, then rather than be driven from the field, Hetty will throw herself as heartily as she can into his new plans of life. This is a resolution nothing short of



heroic, for in spite of her theoretical appreciation of the ascetic, she is in practice as luxurious and pleasure-loving a little Sybarite as a London suburb can furnish. No matter! if cold and hunger and discomfort can do it, she will show herself worthy, and fight Ayesha with her own weapons, if need be.

Arrived at this determination, she springs to her feet and proceeds to bathe her eyes and smooth her hair. Apparently, a brush and comb have been included among the elemental necessities of life, but a looking-glass has not. Then she goes down-stairs. If listening to Ayesha's performance on the violin is considered part of the development of John's higher nature, she will share it with him.

But no sound proceeds from the smoking-room as she approaches it. And I grieve to say that Hetty's moral sense permits her to creep cautiously down the corridor on tiptoe with a view of surprising the devotees of the new culture—nay, that she even contemplates the meanness of listening outside the door to the process by which John's education is being carried on. But this unworthy intention is frustrated by her stumbling half-way down the passage over some obstacle she had not encountered before, and which causes considerable clatter.

When thus sufficiently heralded, she enters the room, she finds Ayesha statuesquely posed and reclining gracefully in a low chair, a heavy volume on her lap, from which she is melodiously reading aloud to John, who is seated almost at her feet and is gazing up at her as though contemplation of the concretely beautiful were his assigned task.

Hetty seats herself without remark. Why should the mistress of the house make any apology to her husband or her guest for entering a room in her own dwelling?

After a moment's pause Ayesha continues to read, and reads on and on for what seems to Hetty an interminable length of time. Her choice is an extremely mystical dissertation on the spiritual life, expressed in language nearly unintelligible to Hetty, and—the latter is happy to think—entirely so to John, who is unversed in the particular jargon of their school. Perhaps the reader's musical voice and the contemplation of her perfect grace are sufficient compensations for this drawback; but as the exhaustion of fatigue and agitation begins to tell upon herself, Hetty notices for her consolation that these pleasures do not prevent her husband from becoming manifestly weary. When he obviously finds it difficult to keep his eyes open, perhaps Ayesha notices it also, for she closes her book and proceeds to expound the theme, though in a manner not much more intelligible than the text.

"I think it is time we sought some repose," she remarks at last, rising languidly. "I fear"—to Hetty—"that our study of these things has but bored and wearied you."

"Not in the least," retorts Hetty mendaciously, trying to assume sprightly air.

"Yes; you are weary," with plaintive reproach, as though, Hetty thinks indignantly, weariness at one o'clock in the morning were a marked symptom of moral and physical inferiority. "But in these matters it is so essential that there should be real approachment between teacher and taught. I question very much"—meditatively as though she were really considering the subject—"whether there is sufficient spiritual affinity between our natures."

Hetty questions it also, and indicates as much by her silence.

"Now compare," pursues Ayesha placidly, in a tolerant come-let-us-reason-together kind of manner, "compare the *ennui* you feel during my ministrations with the quick response of your soul to the revelations of Eustace St. Clare."

This is carrying the war into the enemy's country with a vengeance. Hetty, quite unprepared for this kind of attack, colours hotly and painfully. Her husband has risen abruptly, and leaning against a corner of the mantelpiece stands looking down at her.

"And that is quite as it should be," continues Ayesha approvingly. "In him you find the spiritual affinity you seek in vain—elsewhere"—with a slight but perceptible gesture indicating her host. "He is therefore your natural guide in the realms of thought and feeling."

"He is nothing of the kind!" exclaims Hetty vehemently, unable to keep cool and argumentative, and afraid to look at John, though conscious that his strong right hand is clenched with a force which betrays some inward agitation.

"Nay; why deny an admiration which does you credit? 'We needs must love the highest when we see it'—that is," adds Ayesha, with shameless perversion of the poet's meaning—"the highest to our own perceptions, the nearest to our chosen ideals." She finishes with an admiring glance up at John Simpson's tall figure, as though conveying that her own chosen ideal is quite conveniently near.

That glance enrages Hetty even more than the accusation.

"I never thought him my ideal," she begins scornfully, honestly forgetting in her repugnance to the charge the large amount of truth contained in it. "And as to loving him, why——"

Her husband's voice breaks upon her words—sharpened and incisive as she has never heard it before.

"Hester," he says sternly, and she looks up almost startled at the name; she has not heard it from his lips since the day he said, "I, John, take thee, Hester."—"Hester, I have had a letter from your friend, Miss Derwent."

Hetty turns white to her lips—not, as perhaps the two watching her may be inclined to fancy, with any especial sense of guilt or detection, but from the sheer shock of surprise and disgust at Theresa's shameless treachery. The cold-blooded viper! This, then, is her retaliation for the greater attention bestowed by their prophet on Hetty's bright piquant prettiness than on her own rather faded and angular charms. Hetty feels a sense of self-loathing at the

thought that she ever entered into such an emulation with such a rival. And John, how must it appear to him, especially if he views her conduct through the distorting medium of Theresa's malicious misrepresentations? If they were only alone, she would throw herself at his feet in the most genuine contrition. As it is, she controls herself with an effort and remains silent.

Ayesha takes up the parable.

"The affinities of Nature are at once stronger and more sacred than the bonds of mere legality." (Oh, how familiar the cant is to Hetty, and now how detestable!) "The needs of the soul can only be satisfied where it finds true fellowship. If in Eustace St. Clare——"

A sudden idea occurs to Hetty. She will play a desperate stroke.

"You needn't say anything more," she interrupts huskily, in a voice which she hardly recognises as her own. "No one wants me here! Mr. St. Clare has always been very kind; I will go to him to-morrow, and if he cares——"

With a smothered oath, the blood rushing to his forehead, and his blue eyes flashing fire, her husband starts from his lounging position, and Hetty feels with a sudden thrill of hope that at least his attitude is not one of indifference. But the next moment Ayesha's long white fingers are on his wrist—yes, clasping it firmly under Hetty's very eyes—and Ayesha's voice murmurs some admonition almost into his ear. He knits his brows impatiently, but remains silent. Apparently, he may not even protest against dishonour itself, save at the will and bidding of his enslaver.

"There is much that is commendable in your resolution," says Ayesha blandly; "but to-morrow we will speak further on this matter."

Hetty can endure no more. Too broken-spirited even for anger, she turns silently away, and before she reaches the door a little moan involuntarily escapes her—so piteous, so full of heart-wrung misery that it might well awaken pity in a heart that had once loved her. Perhaps it does; for her husband starts forward with a quick movement, and she distinctly hears Ayesha's voice, no longer soft, say hastily, in a sharp sibilant whisper, "No, Mr. Simpson, remember your promise."

The night that follows Hetty will never forget. She hears, after a short pause, Ayesha's gliding step and trailing garments sweep past her door to a bedroom near. She hears, a few minutes later, her husband retire to his dressing-room and lock the door. And then, it seems to her, she hears all night through every quarter of an hour sound out from the neighbouring church clock. Perhaps physical discomfort has something to do with her wakefulness, for her bed is not inviting to repose; and when she has made the discovery that there are no sheets she gives up the idea of undressing, and wrapping her furs about her, lies down to get such rest as she may. It is not

much. Partly waking, partly sleeping, she passes from one nightmare into another, or wakes to an actual misery worse than any, till at last, not long before the morning breaks, she falls into the heavy slumber of complete exhaustion.

From this she is aroused at length by the cautious opening of the door, and awakens to the consciousness that it is broad daylight, and that somebody is moving in her room. John! and with something in his hand! If it were a goblet of poison, or a knife, Hetty would scarcely be surprised, nor, she thinks bitterly, particularly sorry. But it is not. He places the something carefully on the table beside her, and turns, still with cautious noiselessness, to leave the room. Hetty moves her head sufficiently to view the article.

A cup of tea, hot, fragrant, steaming, and a plate of delicately cut thin bread and butter!

"John! Dear old John!"

The next instant her arms are round his neck, her head buried on his shoulder. She is clinging to him as if for dear life, and pouring out in one tumultuous flood her entreaties, her penitence, her passion of re-awakened and remorseful affection.

And her husband? Well, he really seems just the same kind, forgiving old John she has always known. Hetty could almost believe her last night's experiences but a horrible dream, a nightmare of that revolting woman—that ghastly caricature of her own past self. It couldn't have been John who told her she had better leave him—John, who is holding her clasped tightly to him, soothing her with the warmest caresses, the tenderest words.

But presently, when her agitation has spent itself a little, he says gently:

"Is my wife quite, *quite* certain that it is her husband she loves best? There can't be any half-way, Hetty; it must be all or nothing. Has St. Clare so captivated your fancy——"

"No! no! Oh, John, don't punish me by mentioning his name any more. I loathe the thought of him. He isn't fit to black your boots," sobs Hetty, with feminine exaggeration. "And, indeed, he thinks of nobody in the world but himself. Ah, he"—suddenly beginning to laugh through her tears—"he would never have brought me that cup of tea! By-the-bye, John, oughtn't it to have been the 'harmless and non-exciting pulse'?"

John looks a trifle confused.

"Ah, well," he returned, "perhaps I did not mean quite all I said last night. What do you say, Hetty, to our taking a little trip abroad for a month or two? I can manage it just now, and perhaps it will do us both good and be a fresh start."

"Yes; a kind of honeymoon over again. Oh, do, John; it will be lovely. But oh!" with sudden apprehension, "that woman—that——"

"Ayesha is gone."—"Gone!"

"Yes ; gone already. Do not worry about her, my dear little wife ; she will never trouble you again. But do not ask me any more about her just now."

\* \* \* \* \*

Hetty does not ; she is only too thankful that her nightmare is thus completely dissipated. And it is many months before she learns to recognise her mysterious visitant of that night in matter-of-fact, unromantic Mrs. Polkington-Smith, the wife of one of John's oldest friends—a dark-haired, angular woman of no particular beauty. Paint and powder, false hair, and a dim light did much. A genius for drawing-room acting and a very careful study of her subject did the rest. And even more thankfully than her husband did Hetty express her gratitude to the woman whose clever caricature had shown her her follies and warned her of her dangers as perhaps only a caricature could have done. Verily the Spartan, making of the intoxicated Helot an object-lesson for his sons, was wise in his generation.

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### ARS LONGA ; VITA BREVIS.

A LITTLE peasant boy, with nut-brown eyes,  
And tangled tawny curls, and sunburnt face,  
Stood on his native mountains, when the skies  
Flashed forth their peerless gems thro' pathless space ;  
And there his musing soul—that had been fashioned  
To seek the Empyrean—beat its bars,  
And longed with yearning vain but most impassioned,  
To solve the mystic splendour of the stars !

"O God," he cried—"dear God ! I want to know  
How Thou dost light them all ? They are so bright,  
So beautiful—I love them ! let me go  
Where I can learn about them—night by night !  
I love my granny too, and would not leave her  
For anything but this ; but she has said  
That some day I shall go, tho' it will grieve her,  
For she has only me ; the rest are dead !"

God must have heard the child, for soon He sent,  
To that fair mountain-hamlet, one whose fame  
Was linkéd with the skies—for he had spent  
On them his wealth of years—but now he came  
To bid his flagging pulses rouse and rally ;  
To scent the fragrant pines, the balmy air ;  
To roam by sunny hill and flowery valley,  
And face the thymy breezes blowing there.

O wondrous bitter-sweet !—O fearsome joy !  
When the young peasant-lad, one golden day,  
Heard thus the Stranger's voice—"My little boy,  
'Tis thou dost love the stars, the people say—  
'Tis thou, with bare brown feet and face so ruddy,  
Would'st leave thy granny's cot—thy mountains wild !  
Well, thou shalt come with me, and thou shalt study  
The mysteries of the skies—thou dreamful child !"

O love unspeakable !—O grief untold !  
When granny's heart was breaking, all for him !  
When the slow tears of age—so sad and cold,  
Fell from the kind old eyes whose light was dim.  
O pain of loving hearts that must be parted !  
He kissed her clinging arms, and, sobbing, tore  
His little form away, and outward started,  
But turned to kiss again—and suffered sore.

She stood and watched him from her cottage door ;  
Her face grew very pale beneath its tan ;  
She knew that they would meet on earth no more,  
For she had lived beyond th' allotted span.  
She waved a trembling hand—her breath came sighing ;  
He saw the wrinkled face, the falling tears,  
The hair beneath its cap, so snowy lying ;  
He saw her never more thro' all the years !

Ere long a message reached him—bade him come,  
For granny sighed his name in mortal strait.  
He hastened, but in vain ; her voice was dumb ;  
"She left him all her love ; but could not wait !"  
He grew a great astronomer, whose learning  
Was honoured by the world and noised afar ;  
Thus was fulfilled for him his deepest yearning,  
But ever in his heart he bore a scar !

ALICE MACKAY.





## MARGARET SINCLAIR:

## AN EXPERIENCE.

BY LADY MABEL HOWARD.

LONDON was at its worst, a morning of Spring promise ending in a cold uncertain drizzle of mixed rain and snow, making walking difficult; and as Margaret Sinclair stepped off the damp cold pavement into the warmth of an old-fashioned print-shop, she felt a sudden glow of satisfaction and physical relief. She advanced with hesitation, glancing round in a nervous way indicative of a desire to request a favour.

The shop was strewn in a would-be artistic untidy fashion with water-colours, prints, and a few oil paintings, with and without frames, all more or less heaped upon each other, careless of injury, or lying in odd corners here and there. A man at the far end, who appeared to be engaged in conversation with a customer, murmured an excuse, and hurried forward to interview the new-comer, asking her what he could do for her.

The girl, whose sharp features and unnaturally large eyes denoted the unmistakable signs of consumption, paused for a moment, and the colour came and went in her face; then, arming herself with a momentary courage, drew hurriedly from a parcel she carried a small picture in oils, full of merit, and handing it to the man with hands that trembled, asked him if he would care to buy it, or if he could recommend her to any one who would perhaps give her something for it. Her voice had a deep low tone in it, which gave it a touch of sadness, and the man waited for a moment before replying; then he put it as gently as he could.

"I am afraid," he began, and a sudden shade came into her eager eyes, "I am afraid I cannot help you. It is so very difficult to sell things unless people have a name, or it is some particular subject which attracts the public for the moment. Of course, if you like to leave it with me I can do my best, but I do not think there is a chance of selling it."

Margaret Sinclair silently held out her hand for it. For the moment the disappointment was so great she could not trust her voice, and, as she nervously began putting it back into the paper, she spoke.

"Thank you," she said sadly. "I was afraid it would be no good; but as it is the best thing I have done, I thought I would try."

Just as she was making up her mind to leave, there was a sudden stir, and the man who had been an interested spectator of the little

scene came forward, and approaching Margaret, asked if she would allow him to see her picture. Once more she undid it, and awaited his verdict with a new hope. Though she knew it not, she had the rare gift of genius.

He took it from her carelessly, but, as he looked into it, a sudden and increasing interest came over his face. It represented a woodland scene on the banks of a river, by the side of which was seated a woman, with a dead baby by her side—a commonplace idea, maybe—but the mentally and physically starved face of the woman which looked out of the canvas on to the flowing water was a wonderful conception, and something of the depth of her misery passed into him as he looked at it. Under it was painted in rough letters: "Despair."

Sir John Grayson turned to the girl.

"How did you—where did you see this?"

"I didn't see it," she answered. "One of the women in our buildings told me about it—it was her sister—and I painted it."

Sir John continued to look at the picture in silence.

"I felt it," she continued, more to herself than to him. "You see we live so much amongst pain and sorrow that they are not really imaginations to us."

He handed it back to her, and looked at her intently for a moment; then a thought struck him.

"I want a picture painted," he said. "Do you think you could do it for me, if I described it to you as that woman did? I have been waiting to find someone for months—will you come?"

"If you think I should be good enough," answered Margaret, a little nervously. "But suppose I fail?"

"If you do," he said gravely, "it will be only what has happened before. If you succeed"—here he paused—"I shall be more than content."

"I will try," she said simply. "Tell me when and where I shall come."

He scribbled a few lines on a visiting-card and handed it to her.

"You see," he said apologetically, "I have a studio. I dabble a little in painting myself, and wanted a quiet place; so you will find everything there, canvas, etc."

"Very well," she answered, "I will come to-morrow. Shall it be eleven? I live at Brindley's Buildings, so it will not be far, and I can be earlier if you like."

"No, eleven will do very well; come then. Oh, about terms." A slight flush came over his face. "I thought of offering twenty pounds. Would you think that sufficient?"

Margaret smiled. "That would be riches to me," she answered; "but let us wait till it is done, as it may be worth nothing." And taking up her picture, she opened the door and went out into the damp street.

The next morning found her with a beating heart standing on the steps of the house he had told her of. She was ushered into a small studio on the fourth floor with a good light, littered with unfinished sketches and redolent of tobacco. Sir John was before her, and springing up from a divan on which he had been resting, greeted her kindly, with an effort to reassure her and put her at her ease with him.

"Look," he said, pointing to an easel; "I have put it all ready for you. This is the right-sized canvas; it is only a head I want."

Margaret glanced at the easel in front of her, and began taking her pencils and paints from a bag she had brought with her.

"Now," Sir John continued, "I shall tell you what I want. I shall describe to you the face, and when you have sketched it we will go further into it."

So, with his eyes fixed on her face, he began in a low, soft monotone to describe the features and face of the woman he loved. But to Margaret that idea did not penetrate. The eventual possibilities of the present did not touch her; she only listened as an eager, unconscious artist, although, when she looked back in after days, she knew she must have been under a spell of she knew not what.

He was silent too sometimes, while her rapid pencil worked on from what he had told her, and both were astonished when at two o'clock he looked at his watch and announced a rest and interval for the luncheon his servant had brought for them.

Margaret could hardly bring herself to eat. The unusual break in her monotonous existence, added to the power of his imagination working over and through hers, had worked her into a state of excitement, and her large eyes had an unnatural light in them, born of the interest and emotions of the last three hours; and long before the rest was ended she insisted upon resuming her seat in front of the easel, he standing behind, suggesting and altering till gradually under her fingers grew the likeness, though Margaret was not conscious of it.

As she went homewards she felt more tired than she cared to own to herself. She was conscious of a subtle change which had taken her out of her narrow surroundings. The thought of the daily troubles, the great and small sorrows she came face to face with each day in the large buildings in which she lived, filled her for the first time almost with impatience, followed by a quick anger with herself for having given way to it.

As she entered the courtyard, from out of which towered the large buildings which are such a godsend to the poor, and of which she was a number in Block A, she looked with pity on the many who were going in and out with their burdens, the old ones aged with the daily work of existence, the young ones prematurely wrinkled and worn with the uncertain present and the anxious future. She climbed

the common staircase to her own room at the top, stopping half-way and knocking at a door, which was opened by an old woman, whose aged face lit up on seeing her visitor.

"Eh, my dearie, come in, come in," she said, taking the girl's hands. "And 'ow are ye?"

"I'm well," answered Margaret kindly; "and how's Jim, Mrs. Manners?"—looking across at a young man sitting in a crouched position, her only son, who, from exposure when at work, had been crippled with rheumatism.

"Oh, Jim, 'e ain't no different," answered the woman in a hopeless tone. "But the lidy's been 'ere, and she left a drop of soup, so there'll be dinner to-morrow."

Margaret sighed, silently handed him the paper she had brought him, and then went on her way to her own room, which, although shabby and poor, had a restful, homelike appearance. She lit her fire and prepared her evening meal, after which she sat with her head in her hands in a deep reverie. She generally spent her evenings visiting the sick in some of the blocks, but to-night they waited for her in vain. She sat quite still, looking over the tops of the buildings and into that far distance of London till the March daylight faded, and thousands of lights proclaimed another restless night in the tired city. At last, startled by the neighbouring clock striking ten, she shut her window and went to bed.

The next morning and many mornings saw Margaret at her post. The picture grew day by day, taking its warm soft colour from her eager brush and Sir John's artistic imagination. Bit by bit, in his gentle way, he led her to talk to him, and each day she unbent a little, and told him more and more of her life, and he listened with an attention which surprised himself, a look on his face which would have astonished those who knew him. It was his first real glimpse into the world of work and sorrow, and it affected him strangely. She found herself telling him what she had never told any one before—about her early child's home by the banks of a Hampshire river, in the little village where her father had been curate in charge.

He seemed almost to scent the lilacs and seringa, and to see the tall bulrushes with the water-hens darting in and out, the low-storied house with its wealth of clustering roses and clematis, all made happy with love.

Her voice grew low and trembled a little as she told him of the ruthless severing of the home ties by death; the pittance of twenty-five pounds a year; her own consumptive tendency; her coming finally to the Great City, where the chance of work was good and lodgings were cheap.

She described to him the Buildings, and with her imagination he passed through the courtyard and up the staircases, and he saw the crippled man and his old mother, who had only a certainty of sixpence a week after their room was paid for. He winced when she led him

to the consumptive girl who lived in the room next to hers, who had no wish to live, and with nothing to make dying easier. There was no bitterness, only an intense pity, as she told him of the man dying of typhoid, who was given champagne by the visiting lady, and how he had held it in his hands, hardly daring to drink it because he feared it must have been so terribly expensive. And she led him to another block and showed him the little stunted girl who worked for twelve hours, who had never seen a green field, because her mother was an invalid, and she could not afford to belong to a club. All of these she poured out to him, and he listened with a lump in his throat and a tightening of his heart-strings, when she brought it home to him "how the other half lived."

But though she asked him, he would tell her nothing of his life. How could he? What had he to say to this child of toil, and what would she say if she knew of his endless attempts, along with many others like himself, to kill time—it was impossible; the contrast was too great, the gulf too deep between her gray shadowed life and his butterfly existence. So he held his peace; but he never forgot it.

The last day came, and the picture was almost finished. Margaret arrived early, and, as she uncovered it, he saw her start and change colour. During the three weeks she had sat there day by day yielding her brush to his imagination, she had been unconscious of the production, but now before her was the face of a beautiful woman, and she had painted this!

It was indeed a lovely imagination—for such it was to her—as a figure in a dream. The face was an oval one, the nose just a trifle *retroussé*, and the small mouth slightly open. But the eyes! As she looked at them they seemed to speak to her, to tell her with the whole soul in them, the depth and the power of human love. Did it really exist as it was there, or was it only a beautiful conception of what love might be? It almost frightened her. There was a dawning look too of sadness, a background of tears in the depths of colour.

Sir John was quite alarmed as he saw Margaret's face, and he hastened forward.

"It is nothing," she answered, recovering herself. "It is only—it seems a foolish thing to say—but till now I did not know what I had painted, and it is so extraordinary that I should have done that! The eyes—do you see that look? What does it mean?"

Sir John came behind her and looked at the picture with an answering look of love in his eyes.

"Ah," he said, "we are all longing mortals, my child, and you have painted love and life together in those eyes. It is right too," he continued triumphantly; "the others could never see it, or paint it." Then turning to her: "You are tired, I am sure. Come and rest a little. Why are you so pale?"

"I am not strong," she admitted. "At one time they thought I

could not live to grow up, but now the doctor tells me if I am happy and have no worries I may live and even get stronger. I ought to do so," she added with a reassuring smile, "as I have nothing to fret about, and I can never be very miserable, as I have no relations in the world, no one to be unhappy about."

"And love," he asked, with an involuntary glance at the picture. "Could love never touch you and perhaps bring you unhappiness?"

"I don't think so," she answered simply. "Love will never cross my path. That cannot hurt me."

He looked at her and wondered if any one had ever gone through life without love, but he said nothing, and presently she got up and said she thought she would go, as there was nothing more to do to the picture. He also rose, and once more together they looked at it.

"It is perfect," he said below his breath. "Would you like it if I can get it into the Academy?"

Her whole face lit up with pleasure. "Oh, Sir John," she cried, clasping her hands, "do you think there could be a chance of it?"

"I think so," he answered kindly; and then going to a tin box, he unlocked it, took an envelope out of it, and handed it to her.

"Look," he said, with a slight hesitation, "this is for the picture, and, if you think it is too much, will you"—he paused—"will you send that poor child to the country and give the consumptive woman some grapes and other things,"—and he unbent suddenly—"I want to help her—to die."

Margaret looked at him in astonishment, his usually calm face was working with agitation, and he seemed quite overcome with the thoughts of her poor tales.

"And now good-bye," he said gently, taking her hand in his. "I am going away for two months, but when I come back, I shall hope to see you. Some day, if you go on painting like that, you will be famous."

Margaret shook her head. He opened the door for her, and she passed out of his life into her own everyday surroundings. She had thrust the envelope he had given her into her pocket, but she gave no thought to it. She walked slowly along, and as she threw up her head, a sudden feeling of spring in the air, and with it the "rage of living" came over her.

It was a beautiful April day, with the squares bursting into young green, and as she passed along, the ladies alike seemed to have decked themselves in spring attire, and the air was laden with the scent of violets, primroses and lilies, which they wore with reckless profusion. Ah! London in spring was a joy, though she never remembered having thought it so before, and, as yet, poor child, she knew not why it seemed so to her. As she climbed the long stone stairs and passed the women busily washing and talking in their shrill untutored voices, she hardly heard them. Her whole being was



singing out loud that the spring had come, and all that it touched was made beautiful. She stood at her window watching the sun catch each house-top in turn, and afar she saw the towers of Westminster standing in solemn dignity among their poor surroundings. She felt she was too happy, too light-hearted to stay in her dull, close little room; so, running down-stairs again, she went out once more into the bright sunshine, and climbed to the top of an omnibus going northwards.

She got down at last to walk home. It was getting late, and the April sun was nearly setting as she turned down Park Lane into Hamilton Place. As she was passing an open door, at which stood a brougham, instinct made her pause for a moment, as a lady running quickly down the steps just cast a casual glance on Margaret. But even in that moment there could be no doubt that she was the original of her picture. Ah, it was no dream face—faultless it was indeed—but there was none of that expression in the eyes in real life; they were full of colour, clear and hard; but Margaret, with a flash of true intuition, knew she had given her what she never could have—a loving soul. It all took a moment, and somehow it was no surprise to her that Sir John should follow. He did not see her, and as he got into the carriage, a clear young voice from the door cried out—

“Don’t be late for your wedding to-morrow, Jack.” There was a laughing rejoinder, and the brougham drove away.

Margaret remained for a moment almost rooted to the place where she stood. Then she remembered and walked on. She felt a chill in the spring air: it seemed quickly to have grown darker, and the shadows were long. She was conscious of a weariness and heaviness, and told herself she had gone too far.

She went slowly home, back to the little room and to her window; then, suddenly, as she stood there, a paroxysm passed through her, paining her in its intensity, and it all lay open before her. She knew what had given her that afternoon’s joy, recognised that love had met her, and triumphed over her, and realised the hopelessness of the passion which was overwhelming her. She thought it all out by her open window, regardless of the cold night air; lived once more through each day; each hour of the last three weeks, and knew that she had painted her own unconscious love into the eyes of her picture; and felt that the best and the worst of life had come to her. Her poor heart cried out for what she could never have, followed by the rebellion of youth when it comes across fate. Then her rebellion turned to despair, and she prayed God to give her back her heart, to take away this pain; but she knew that love and life had bound themselves together in her, and she would never free herself in the world. At last from exhaustion she slept.

For many days after a stupor came over her. She visited her neighbours in the block, she distributed food and comforts from the

large bank-note Sir John had given her, but their tears of gratitude passed over her, and nothing seemed to touch her. One night the mother came to say Jane was dying—would Margaret come? She followed her, and there her stony heart melted; the piteous long-drawn sobs shook her slight frame as she knelt by the side of the dying girl, who tried to comfort her. She made efforts to control herself; but her heart was wrung for herself, for her hopeless love, for the sorrow and drudgery of those among whom she lived, who were dying without knowing what it meant to live, for pity for the many thousands round her who were waiting for death as their best friend.

As she rose from the dead girl's bed, she felt strangely old and tired, and that night was the beginning of the end. But she was not idle. With anxious, feverish fingers she painted a life-like picture of the man she loved. With piteous energy she worked on with it till she was too weak to hold her brush. Those to whom she had done many a kindness rallied round her, striving to do what they could for her. She talked little, except to thank them. They told her of the success she had had: that her picture had been accepted for the Academy, but the news came too late. It nearly broke the heart of the lady who visited to see her earnest gaze fixed on the face of the picture at the foot of her bed; but it was the only comfort she had; and so, all unconscious, he helped her to die.

\* \* \* \*

It was June, and London was at its fullest. Sir John passed through the archway of Brindley's Buildings to visit his little artist friend. The porter came out, and in answer to his inquiry, told him he was too late; then seeing the shocked look in his face, told him to go upstairs and see the old woman who had principally tended her. Sir John knocked at the door indicated, and Mrs. Manners came out.

At first she was filled with surprise, but recognising him almost immediately from the picture in Margaret's room, led him in, and fetching it from behind the cupboard, handed it to him.

He looked at it in silence, his heart too full for words, as she told him how it had comforted Margaret, and how she had wished him to have it.

"Ah, sir," she said, sobbing, "we miss 'er, we do. It ain't often we 'ave time to think of them as is gone, but she was different some'ow."

Sir John went out into the street again, and made his way to the Academy.

A large portion of the London world was passing to and fro before the picture, which was attracting much attention, both from connoisseurs and idlers. It was Margaret's painting of his wife, and as he took up his position opposite, the remarks of a man and woman in front of him fell on his ear.

"If she had that expression in her eyes," murmured the man, "she would be the most beautiful woman in the world, but she never could love any one but herself. She has no soul."

"I must find out who is the artist," answered the woman lightly. "It is a wonderful picture;" and they passed on, and others took their places.

But Sir John sat there. The light broke in upon him at last, and with it the conviction that it was all true; his wife had no soul. He had bitterly fought against the disillusion, but now it would take no denial; and as he looked again and again at those wonderful eyes in the picture, he knew that they were the eyes of the girl who had loved him, and who had painted the picture with her soul speaking through them.

With the revelation strong upon him, and the tragedy of her short life before him, the world took another aspect, and with these new sensations he lost hold of his past bearings; but, through all, he was dimly conscious that the best of life had been offered to him, the cup brimming over with love, and that, without knowing or caring, he had flung it away amongst the broken toys of life; enveloped in his own egotistical imaginations he had pursued shadows, and refused what the gods had offered him. But the best of regrets cannot restore, and in time it became a softened memory, with no bitterness in it.

He was overwhelmed with letters from friends and even strangers, requesting the name of the artist. To all he gave the same short answer: she was dead. A few went so far as to think he did not want the painter known.

But it was best as it was, and he knew it. The problems of life had been too hard for her; no fortune or fame could have healed her broken heart, and she was at rest.



## IN THE TWILIGHT.

*(See Frontispiece.)*

THEY sit together in the twilight hour,  
The poet and the maid :  
The silver moonlight brightens o'er her form,  
But his is in the shade.

Save where a moonbeam falling on his face  
Reveals the graven lines  
Wherein the struggles of a stormy soul  
Have stamped their secret signs.

The music rises 'neath his subtle touch  
In contest, wail, and cry :  
Then with a gentle murmur as of "Hush,  
An angel passes by!"

And then it marches onward as a soul  
Refreshed and braced and strong,  
Until it stands before the throne of God  
And dares to burst in song.

He calls this music from the dreamy depths  
Of his Past, strange and sad :  
But to his listening sister, it foretells  
Her Future, sweet and glad.

For while his fingers wander o'er the keys,  
There rises to his view  
The loveliness of lands she never saw,  
Faces she never knew.

But she sits silent, conning o'er her tale,  
All of one faithful heart,  
Bound to her own as hers is bound to it,  
Though the wide world apart.

Then as he closes in triumphant chords,  
(Earth's anguish left behind !)  
She hears "My love is on his homeward way  
Before a favouring wind!"

Yet haply, someday, when his grave has closed  
And shut him in from pain,  
There will float back upon her wakened soul  
This unforgotten strain.

And o'er her, blushing from a fireside kiss,  
A spirit wing will gleam,  
And she shall catch a hint of higher bliss  
Her girlhood did not dream!

ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO.

## IN THE NIGHT-WATCHES.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "IN LOTUS LAND,"  
"LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," ETC., ETC.



"FEW English counties are more interesting than Kent," said Canon X., hovering round his favourite theme as a moth round a candle.

We were still standing before the west front of the cathedral, looking out up the far-stretching country and winding river, bathed in the afternoon light. The day had been almost as a furnace seven times heated, and all nature seemed languishing and exhausted.

"Rochester and its neighbourhood claim a large portion of that interest," continued our

ecclesiastical friend. "Inland, it overflows; whilst its shores are unrivalled in historical incident."

"Why should Kent have been favoured above all others?" asked Sir Fred.

"That is easily accounted for. Lying in the narrowest part of the Channel, it was open to all invaders. Here came Julius Cæsar, half a century before the birth of Christ; and at once the civilisation of Rome was brought to bear upon the savageness of the ancient Britons."

"Certainly they improved the country," said Sir Fred; "but I don't know that they did much to elevate the people."

"For two reasons," returned the canon. "The barbarity of the ancient Britons was too ingrained to yield easily to any influence, however mighty; and secondly the Romans themselves, being heathen, lacked the greatest of all softening elements."

"What then would Cæsar think of his new conquest?"

"Delighted, of course," replied the canon briskly. "Cæsar was great, not only as a conqueror, but as a man of intellect and vast and keen penetration. His only defect was that he did not know how to choose his friends. In spite of their rude state, he saw that the Britons were made of wood that would bear carving. Advancing, he

was struck with the beauty and richness of the island ; the extent of its woods and forests ; velvety fields and spreading trees ; serene skies and bracing atmosphere—a thousand times clearer, more healthy and more sparkling than to-day. All this was very different from the hot, arid, enervating countries that were too often the scene of his triumphs."

"Yet the influence of Cæsar and his times has all passed away," remarked Sir Fred.

"What influence would survive 2000 years?" returned the canon drily. "But I don't altogether agree with you. The Romans laid a foundation on which others built, and this influence in some ways remains to this day. Five centuries after Cæsar came Hengist and Horsa, landing almost at the very same spot ; and with them the Teutonic element, which perhaps more than any other has established our race."

"One can understand that. There was a strength and roughness about it that appealed to the Britons far more than the Roman element ever did," said Sir Fred.

"No doubt," returned the canon. "The Romans were too much in advance of the Britons. But time went on, and the stream of civilisation was steadily though slowly flowing. From Hengist and Horsa to Harold were centuries of progress. Many fine characters were developed, of which a few are mentioned in history. Thus when William of Normandy took it into his head to come over, he found a very different people from the race that opposed the landing of Cæsar."

"I often wonder what the Saxons would have developed into if the Normans had never invaded them?"

"An idle speculation, my dear Sir Fred, seeing the question can never be answered. No doubt in some ways we should have lost. The Normans brought a flood of refinement with them ; they were an artistic people, with correct ideas of beauty and splendour, and power and energy to carry them out. And at the time of the invasion they were at their best and greatest. Think of the buildings we owe to them—Rochester amongst others. All that early period holds for me an indescribable charm. The days of the Ancient Britons, shrouded in so much of the mystery that veils the long past ; the Romans, Saxons, Normans—it is a world apart. I never tire of imagining scenes that took place. Sometimes in my dreams they pass before me in quick succession. Many a time I awake fancying myself an Ancient Briton fighting for freedom against the Roman invader. You laugh," said the canon, himself laughing, "for I don't look very much like an Ancient Briton, or a man who could buckle on sword and carry shield and helmet. But all these early times, changes and transitions have formed one of the studies of my days. I think I have read every word that ever was written upon the subject."

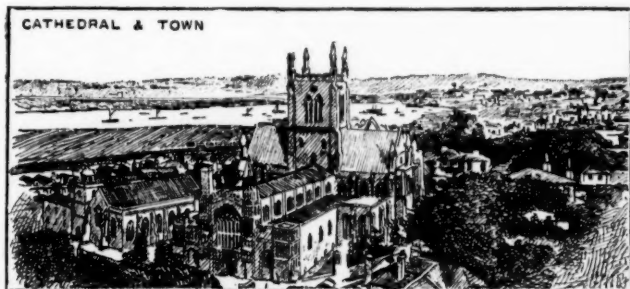


"There is also the religious element of interest," observed Sir Fred. "The landing of St. Augustine; the conversion of Ethelbert; the founding of Canterbury; the murder of Becket—dramas and tragedies without end."

"And all these tremendous incidents throwing their halo over Kent," added the canon. "We cannot forget that Canterbury first began to Christianise England. Of the early days of the Saxons, we know little, but we do know that with St. Augustine the great change began in earnest. St. Paul himself could not have been more enthusiastic or worked more persuasively. Ethelbert, as you say, was converted and baptised. Then followed an almost universal conversion."

"And public baptisms in the river," said Sir Fred, "when crowds assembled daily, and Augustine and his fellow-workers set their seal upon them."

"And Christian churches were built, their turrets pointing to the skies," added the canon; "Canterbury taking the lead. The



ROCHESTER.

present Cathedral is of course not the original, but stands on the site of that early British church, built in the form of the old Basilica of St. Peter's at Rome. Of course Augustine founded a convent, and built him a church without the walls, as a burial-place for himself and his fellow-monks. The Cathedral he dedicated to the Saviour, the church to Peter and Paul: but the latter dedication was changed to St. Augustine in 978, by St. Dunstan—some five centuries after Augustine had slept with his fathers. Augustine and Ethelbert were both buried here. It was meet the great missionary and his most illustrious convert should lie side by side. The monastery grew powerful; multitudes flocked to its shrine; the Anglo-Saxon kings endowed it largely; the Benedictine monks ranked next to the head at Monte Cassino. But the tide turns for people as well as for seas, and its long and flourishing existence came to an end in 1538, under the iron rule of Henry VIII."

"The iron rule, in this instance, was a golden rule," laughed Sir Fred; "for this despoiling of monasteries filled his own coffers to

overflowing. A less unscrupulous man might have been equally tempted. With King Harry, to wish a thing was to have it. He had too many outlets for his gold to miss any molten stream that would flow into his exchequer."

"Waters strictly preserved," smiled the canon. "Well, all these incidents and events throw their glamour upon Rochester, even after the passing of centuries. It shared largely in the privileges and prosperity that began to fall upon England from the day Augustine placed his foot upon her soil. The Romans, it is true, had done much; but religiously they left the Britons as barbarous as they found them. It was the influence brought by St. Augustine that could alone work a radical change of character. He had been eleven years in Canterbury when he sent Justus on his first great mission to Rochester. Ethelbert could deny him nothing; Augustine never had a more sincere convert than this great Saxon; and he built Justus a cathedral on the site of the old, half-ruined Saxon church. The city itself was founded upon a Roman camp, the Roman troops deserting it in the fifth century when captured by a Saxon chief. The Watling Street—that high road used by the Canterbury Pilgrims—ran through the centre of the camp. The Saxons, alas, destroyed the Roman walls, not a vestige of which remains; but a little of the later mediæval walls may still be found, bordering the river."

"And what followed?" laughed Sir Fred. "Not that brotherly love, that unity and harmony, one has a right to expect from the doctrines of our present dispensation."

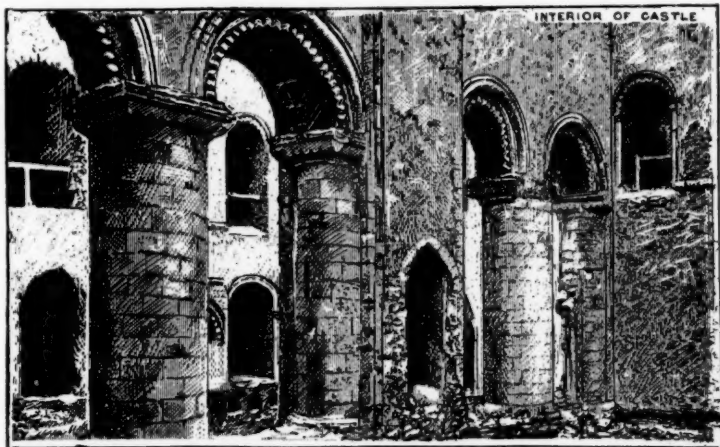
"You are wrong," cried the canon emphatically. "Unity and harmony were never prophesied for Christianity: a sword, not peace, as you well know. And so there came schism and fighting; a Church militant; the bishop now donning his mitre, now flashing his sword; sometimes, indeed, running away, or barricading himself in his fortress, when moral courage outran physical. I fear the sword of contention will be seen in the Church to the end of time, though we may well hope that the fires of Smithfield, the massacres of St. Bartholomew, the martyrdom of the Early Christians—such as the murder of a St. Paul and the fighting with beasts at Ephesus—will never again find their place in history."

"Who knows?" returned Sir Fred. "History has a strange way of repeating itself; human nature a wonderful tenacity to the old Adam; what has been, may be again. I have not much faith in mankind, taking it all round. But—to leave ancient times for a moment—have not modern days contributed to the interest of Rochester? Have not such men as Dickens thrown some sort of a romance over it?"

"Ay; and so has Shakespeare for the matter of that," returned the canon. "Not Dickens alone rendered Gad's Hill famous. Here came the highwaymen in the days of Elizabeth. Gad, you know, is old English for vagabond: hence gad-about; a vagabond lady, who

spends her time tittle-tattling from house to house, working mischief and stirring up scandal, and thinking what a good time she is having. Here Falstaff was attacked and lost his booty—courage he had none to lose. The Falstaff Inn still flourishes in a quiet way, and beside it the group of cedars that Dickens loved. To me they are always melancholy trees suggesting a churchyard; for ever chanting nature's requiem or Dead March, if I may so fantastically put it. Dickens's old house is not far from the inn and the gloomy trees—the road divides them: as ugly and prosy a house as you can well imagine. But we all have our ideas of beauty."

"Fortunately," laughed Sir Fred; "or some of the plain women who marry would die old maids. What a mystery that is. Very often the most attractive women are passed over, and others, without apparently a redeeming feature to recommend them, land rich prizes."



"I think your remark applies to the exception, not the rule," returned the canon. "And, by the way, I have seen no intimation, heard no rumour, of your joining the Benedick Brotherhood. How is this, with all the advantages fate and nature have heaped upon you with so lavish a hand?"

"You will have to wait long for the rumour, I fear," laughed Sir Fred. "Of plain women I will have none; and pretty women all give themselves airs and graces. They seem to think that because they are comely, they may commit every folly and every frivolity under the sun."

"Is that your experience?" returned the canon, smiling. "Mine is rather the other way. I so often find gracefulness of form allied to gracefulness of spirit."

"Ah, my dear canon, they don't show themselves to you in their true colours."

"You mean that because I am growing old and grey-headed, they treat me accordingly," smiled the canon. "It may be so; but even that shows consideration and amiability."

"I mean that your experience has been limited and privileged," replied Sir Fred: who, in spite of his argument, worshipped beauty and believed in goodness. "Your life has been passed in the sacred precincts of a close; where the shadow of a cathedral, and the distant sound of the organ at morning and evening service have fallen upon receptive minds. The religious atmosphere surrounding all has had its effect upon the gentle hearts that year after year beat under the exceptional influence."

"My experience has been wider than you imagine," returned the canon. "As a young man, thrown in the midst of London life, nearly allied to several of the families that ruled the beau-monde, I mixed much with the great world; and I felt then, as I do now, that our women, and especially our pretty women—were the great levers of Society."

"True; for good or ill—but chiefly for ill," laughed Sir Fred. "No mischief ever was rife, but a woman was at the bottom of it."

"Sir Fred, Sir Fred, you will rouse my wrath. You don't believe what you say, for you love beauty and goodness, and know they exist and go hand in hand. Every man knows and believes this who has had a good mother: from the days when our favourite St. Augustine closed the eyes of his mother Monica at Ostia, and recorded her as a model for all time, down to a little and very perfect household I knew so well at Chatham, of which a certain lad who shall be nameless was the idol and the spoilt darling."

The colour ebbed and flowed in Sir Fred's sensitive face, and a mistiness rose unbidden to the eyes at the recollection called up. He was silent.

"Ah," murmured the canon, on whom the signs of emotion were not lost, "I prophesy that you will one day be the man most completely in love in all England. You will go to the opposite extreme; worship your wife; spoil her with kindness; indulge your children; refuse them nothing. Would I were as sure of the apron!"

We had given our last look at the Cathedral and the surrounding country, and were quietly wending our way through the interesting town towards the steps where the launch awaited us.

"Look at this house, now," cried the canon, coming to a halt. "Here, once upon a time, came one who could have presented me with the apron and raised me to the Ecclesiastical Bench, an' she pleased; for she would do nothing she did not please; and there was nothing she would not do had she a mind to it."

"Only one woman could answer to that description," returned Sir Fred; "for only one woman ever combined the power and intellect to place the world at her feet and keep it there. Many women have subdued men; only one woman ever ruled the world."

"Right—the great Elizabeth," cried the canon. "That woman of a strangely complex and dual nature : a nature never understood. No one, as far as I know, ever possessed the key to Elizabeth's character ; the motives which influenced her conduct ; the moral contradictions of which she was made up ; now rising to heights which brought a sixth-rate England to be ruler of the world, now over and over again stooping to acts unworthy of any woman : yet living in spite of all in the hearts of her people as few sovereigns have lived."

"Envy and jealousy were at the bottom of very much of it," said Sir Fred. "That and the mixed qualities inherited from her father."

"That has always been my own opinion," returned the canon. "She was a woman of deep feeling ; capable of strong emotion ;



longing in her heart for the domestic ties and happiness shared by the lowliest as the greatest of her subjects ; envious of the paradise from which she was shut out ; for human nature exaggerates the unattained. Thus her disappointed affections, leading to envy and jealousy and all that is out of joint, will furnish a key to her capricious humours and inconsistent moods. A jealous woman is in some senses a mad woman. Under the influence of the green-eyed monster, her acts are tinged with insanity. And here once—nay twice—came this wonderful woman, on the occasion of surveying her fleet at Chatham, dwelling within these very walls."

The canon pointed to an old house, gabled, lattice-paned, and picturesque.

"Satis House," said Sir Fred. "Many a time have I been in it as a boy, when who had come there and who had gone, and the great Elizabeth, and all antiquarian considerations were outside my world. It is probably the most interesting house in the neighbourhood."

"One of them, at any rate," returned the canon. "Satis House, as it is now called. What it was called in Elizabeth's day, I don't know. It is said to have been so named because, on leaving, Elizabeth briefly expressed her thanks in the one word *Satis*. She could be brief—and ungracious—if she chose; many an authentic record tells us that; but I have never believed in this particular and somewhat commonplace tradition."

"I don't know," laughed Sir Fred. "She was perhaps in one of her bad moods. Something may have gone wrong with the spit in the kitchen; or the sherris-sack and canaries may not have been to her liking. She was fastidious about her wines, the great Elizabeth; and a small thing would ruffle her capricious majesty."

"You do her injustice, Sir Fred. Elizabeth was never a woman who cared much for cakes and ale; though she enjoyed a good dinner, after the manner of all healthy people, whether they stand and serve or whether they reign. But there, at any rate, is the house; there is no doubt about that; and there stayed Elizabeth. On one occasion she spent five days, partly at the *Crown*, partly at Satis House: which belonged to Richard Watts, who was not only royally hospitable, but founded many charities: one of them recording that 'six poor travellers may receive here lodgment, entertainment and four-pence each, for one night, provided they be not rogues nor proctors.'"

"Ah! I think Dickens makes use of that," said Sir Fred. "I believe that 'proctor' here means a rogue, not the respectable luminary who helped to perform marriages and otherwise ministered to the law. Was Richard Watts's proctor taken from them or *vice versa*?"

"Take care," laughed the canon, "or you may be had up for libel."

"I plead privilege," returned Sir Fred. "But Richard Watts's proctor meant rogue, did it not?"

"It did; and referred to an Act passed in the reign of Edward VI., allowing messengers or 'proctors' to collect alms for bedridden people. The office was so abused that in the next reign it was abolished, and the word proctor henceforth denoted a vagabond."

"I suppose all traces of the original *Crown Inn* have disappeared?" asked Sir Fred. "It would be interesting to see the humble quarters the great Elizabeth put up with when she visited the old town."

"I don't know that they were so very humble," returned the canon. "In those days their large rooms panelled with oak were full of dignity and very artistic. Few houses remain at this day as



they were then, excepting sundry old country mansions. The *Maypole Inn* outside the town, though much injured by the rioters, is still very old and interesting. It is said to have been built in Henry VIII.'s time; and here, too, Elizabeth is said to have slept. But, like Charles, where did she not sleep, if we are to believe tradition? In the rising of 1648, Rochester played its part. The men of Kent were Royalists to the backbone, and Rochester furnished 1,000 men out of the 10,000 that marched towards London to petition for the Restoration. But Fairfax met them at Blackheath with his trained men and drove them back. They crossed the Medway in the best way they could: Fairfax pursued, took Maidstone, and the men of Kent fell bravely."

"And what did Charles do for Kent after the Restoration?"

"Nothing. When did Charles II. ever do anything out of gratitude? He was not like Napoleon, who never forgot those that had assisted him in misfortune. Charles was too busy with his



GAD'S HILL: FALSTAFF INN.

pleasures even to look to the welfare of his country. The foes of the Stuarts were indeed they of their own household. Charles slept here the night before the Restoration at what is now called Restoration House; then turned his back upon Rochester and dismissed it from his mind."

"No wonder ill-luck followed them. The Old Pretender was a true Stuart," said Sir Fred.

"And sealed the fate of the House," added the canon. "Yet I have always felt sorry for them—it might all have been so different. Here came Pepys, who records his visit to Rochester as 'the pleasantest time in all respects that ever I had in my life.' I fear I cannot hold a brief for Pepys, however much I admire his Diary. And here came the great lexicographer, as Miss Pinkerton calls him, who declares that at a Freemason's funeral he was for the first time affected by musical sounds. I don't think this was so much want of feeling in the great doctor as the elementary state of music and musical instruments.

I doubt if a virginal or harpsichord or ill-played fiddle would raise emotion in any of us."

So talking we at last reached the water, where the launch awaited us, and were soon steering through the surrounding craft. The world was beginning to quiet down; labour was over; the men had left the dockyard; the gun wharf was silent; the dry docks, full of invalided vessels, were enjoying a serene repose. Eight o'clock was about to strike, and soon the sun would set. Even now it threw a broad red glare upon the water. The fiery ball had never looked more fiery; the few clouds floating about the sky were so many slow-moving tongues of flame. In the splendid saw-mills to the N.E. work had also ceased.

"Here our fleet was burnt by the Dutch," said the canon, "thanks to the carelessness of the age, a licentious court, and a monarch who it may be never said a foolish thing, but certainly never did a wise one. What a picture Pepys draws of the time. Can you not see him burying his gold and treasures in his garden, wise and wary man that he was; the heavy heart and anxious mind with which it was put out of sight; the rejoicing with which everything was restored to its place when danger was over."

"I think his Diary more graphic and interesting than Evelyn's," said Sir Fred; "for it brings the true state of the times far more visibly before you. I wonder what Elizabeth would have said and done had the burning of the fleet happened in her time?"

"It would have broken her heart, as the loss of Calais broke Mary's heart," replied the canon. "But it could never have happened in Elizabeth's time, who looked well to the ways of her country. She was also fortunate in having what Charles II. had not—wise statesmen."

"Partly because she knew how to choose them," said Sir Fred.

"That I grant you. She was a woman of masculine intellect and keen penetration; her statesmen were not slow to recognise the fact that she was their equal, and accordingly were ruled by her."

"But she spoilt so much by having her favourites and indulging them at the expense of her honesty; not caring whom she injured to gratify her whim. Look at the state of the Church in her reign; the appointments that were made; the sequestrations that took place—much owing to her favourite and unscrupulous Leicester."

"A sad picture," replied the canon. "I have not a word to say in its favour—excepting that it was three centuries ago; that the Church had not settled down upon her lees, but was almost in a state of transition; a vessel launched upon troubled waters. Organisation had yet to be accomplished."

We were fast gliding down the river, which broadened out into Sheerness water, flushed and brilliant with the setting sun. Birds flew about us. White-winged gulls, disturbed by our passage, rose up with wild clang and scream, then followed in our wake in the hope

of "largesse." A little way off, the *Daphne*, with her exquisite outlines, looked a wonderful thing of beauty as she floated upon the waters.

"I have half a mind to buy her," said Sir Fred, more than ever impressed with the yacht as she stood out in the splendour of the evening. "I would buy her if she were only a little larger."

"You will never find a prettier craft, Sir Fred. Even I can see that," remarked the canon. "Happy man! Who would not be you, with all the world before you, and all the world can give?"

"Excepting the winged angel," laughed Sir Fred.

"Patience, patience, my dear boy. You have life before you. *Tout vient à qui sait attendre*—a truth in which I have perfect faith. I have a weakness for certain French proverbs—they express so much."



"Philosophy in a nutshell, as my old tutor used to say," laughed Sir Fred. "Here at last is the *Daphne*, and I will give you another French proverb, very apropos to the moment: quite as forcible as yours, but not so eloquent. *Ventre affamé n'à point d'oreilles*. I hope you are ready for dinner—for it awaits your pleasure."

A few moments more and we were on board, the restless gulls wheeling and clanging about us, instead of going to roost.

"Perhaps there is a strike in the bird world, and they are starving," said Sir Fred, sending for bread and biscuit, which he threw upon the water. They wheeled down and devoured it, fighting for the prizes.

"The same with birds as with men," he laughed; "everyone for himself."

"It is all a dream," said the canon, looking round upon the exquisite sunset scene. "A dream from which I shall presently

awaken to find that all has vanished. It has come so suddenly upon me. This morning I was planning out what I should do to-day, to-morrow, and the day after, and in a moment the scene changes, my plans dissolve into thin air, and I am committed to the uncertainties of winds and waves. Pray what are your intentions, Sir Fred?"

"As strictly honourable as unformed," was the laughing reply. "As uncertain as your winds and waves. We start for somewhere this evening; at once, in fact; down channel. Mr. Hurst," summoning the pilot, "is all ready?"

"At any moment, Sir Fred. Captain Malcolm has carried out your instructions to the letter. I am glad to have you on board with us, sir," turning with an impressive salute to the canon; "very much relieved. A disagreeable thing happened just as we were starting last night, and it has been a good deal on my mind all day. I am in hopes that your reverence will counteract the evil influence."

The incident had to be explained.

"A bird of ill omen, like Poe's raven," said the canon, "but fortunately with a disposition to wander. Mr. Pilot, I do not believe in signs and symbols, warnings and evil omens. In the course of my long life I have never found one of them come true. Were I on a sick bed, and a hundred dogs howled at the door and a hundred bats flew in at the window, they would not disturb my peace of mind."

"Then I can only say, sir, that we are not all made alike," returned the old pilot, shaking his head and looking disappointed; "for if that happened to me I should die of terror, though I might otherwise have recovered."

"So making the signs fulfil their own evil tidings," laughed the canon.

"Ay, sir; I believe in them. I too have had a long life, and I have seen too many signs and omens come true to the very letter not to believe in them. But there may be counteracting influences, and I think with the presence of your reverence, we shall be more than a match for any powers of evil that may be lurking about. I have strong faith in bell, book and candle—backed by the Church."

"That suggests a ghostly element and a ghostly hour, and gives me an idea," laughed Sir Fred. "We will have a midnight drama—a play of the early centuries; steam round to Ebbe's Fleet and land in the Night-Watches. You, my dear canon, shall be St. Augustine. We might be Hengist and Horsa, only unfortunately a few centuries divide them; so we must support you as lay brothers. We will imagine Ethelbert under a spreading oak, surrounded by his warriors, and picture the interview. Mr. Hurst, can you pilot us round to Ebbe's Fleet?"

"Ay, Sir Fred. Ebbe's Fleet as it used to be called. If you are bent upon landing there in the Night-Watches, at any rate we shall have moonlight to help us. She only wants three days of the full."

"Then that's settled," said Sir Fred. "And now, my dear canon, to dinner—your butterflies' wings flavoured with the bloom of peaches. My steward, like your digestion, exacts military time, but he will not get it to-night. It is a quarter past eight, and the last fragment of the sun has disappeared. What a glorious evening it is!—we ought to have dined on deck."

The shades of night were falling when we once more found ourselves face to face with nature. The *Daphne*, speeding through the waters, was well round the Island of Sheppey, the wide German Ocean on the one side, the low, darkening cliffs of the land on the other. A brilliant moon, sailing upwards, took the place of daylight as the afterglow died out; objects on the land stood out in sharp black outlines; the churches of Minster and Warden especially prominent. Behind Minster the wooded hills rose like a



RESTORATION HOUSE.

dark patch in the moonlight. At Warden Point the cliffs came to an end.

"The Land's End of Sheppey," said the canon, "or very near it. We have our Land's End just as much as the proud people of Cornwall; only, I fear it is less permanent and certainly less romantic. Our cliffs are not beautiful red sandstone, but uninteresting London clay. The whole island is London clay."

"That makes the encroachment of the sea a little less sad," said Sir Fred, "for I believe it is steadily advancing."

"Steadily and not slowly," returned the canon. "One day it will all disappear, and the land we now look upon will be part of the sea. Nothing will be left but a record and a name. But I have always held a brief for Sheppey, and once thought that to hold the minster would fulfil the ambition of my life. The Abbey Church is said to be

the oldest in England ; contains fourteenth-century brasses, and in the south wall, the tomb of Sir Robert de Shurland of Edward I.'s time."

"My dear canon, you would have been buried alive," cried Sir Fred. "Fancy hiding your talents in Sheppey, and preaching learned sermons to 'tenders of sheep.'" For the canon was noted for the depth and research of his discourses, the soundness of his theology, the beauty and poetry of the language in which he clothed his ideas. "Besides which," added Sir Fred, "you would soon have died of ague, or malarial fever, or anything else bred in the marshes. How runs the proverb? 'Who would not live long, let him live at Tong.' What applies to one part of Sheppey, probably applies to the whole."

"I daresay I should have sunk into a bit of a hermit," smiled the canon, "for that is rather my nature. Had I lived in the days of St. Augustine I should probably have been a monk ; not from asceticism, but because I love quiet and contemplation."

"Lived in a cave, perhaps," laughed Sir Fred, "like Ignatius Loyola when he left the Monastery of Montserrat for Manresa, exchanging sword and helmet for hermit's cowl and cloak. But imagine a Protestant monk—could there be a greater contradiction in terms?"

"It is certainly against our creed to evade the world rather than fight it," said the canon. "Our spiritual weapons would rust out for want of use. But as Lord of the Minster I should not have been a monk, though I might have become a bookworm, absorbed in abstruse studies and preaching to my tenders of sheep in an unknown tongue : producing in their astonished brains what Sir Walter calls a slight obfuscation of intellect."

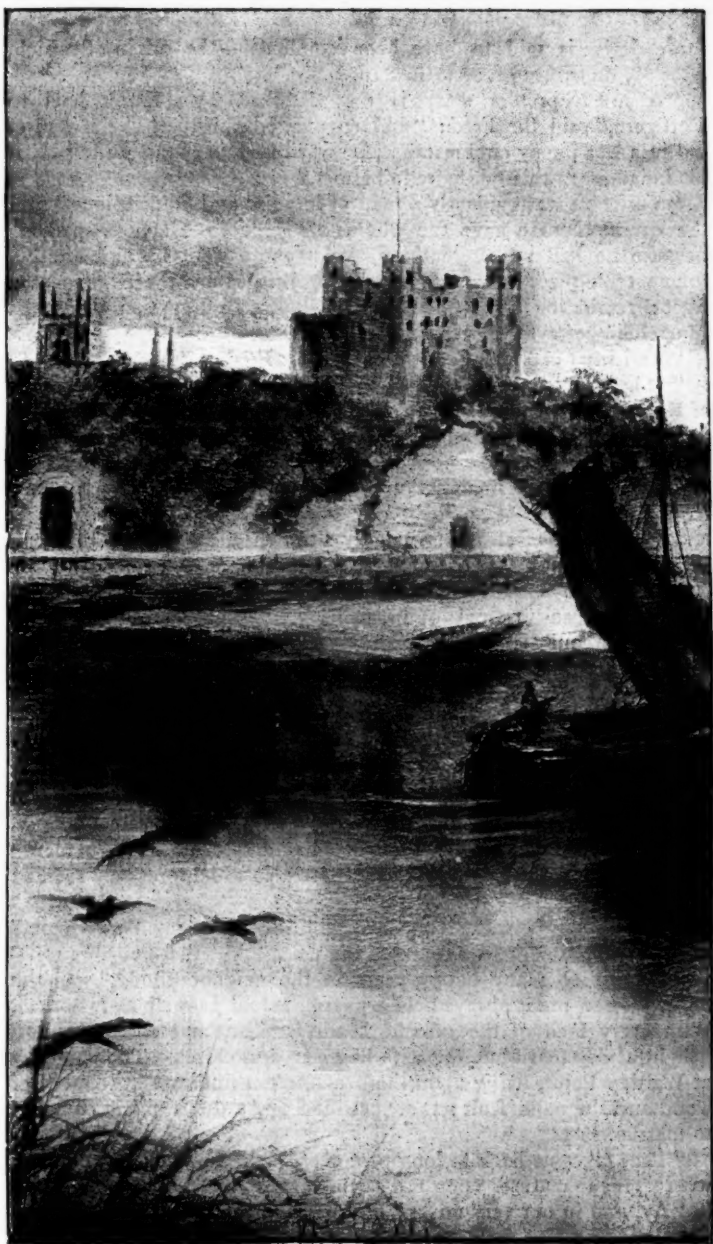
"I am quite sure, my dear canon, that you would have devoted your days, energies and income to restoring the ruins of the Abbey, iving yourself in one of the old convent cells for the sake of economy. There would have been no end to the possibilities of leading a picturesque and ideal existence."

"Combined with extreme discomfort and monkish fare," laughed the canon. "I don't think I could ever have become quite so uncivilized ; and it is only when the temperature is up to 120 that I prescribe butterflies' wings and the bloom of peaches. Even you must be satisfied with the tribute I have just paid to your *recherché* bill of fare. Nothing passed me."

Sir Fred laughed. He was the most hospitable of hosts, and nothing pleased him more than appreciation.

"You mentioned Tong just now," pursued the canon. "Where will you find more romantic and historical ground? It was here that Hengist asked Vortigern, after their first battle, to give him as much land as an oxhide would encompass. The hide, cut into narrow strips, measured the ground on which the castle was built. It was then called *Thong* Castle, from the thongs of hide used in measurement. When the descendants of Hengist took Calcutta, the





ROCHESTER CASTLE.

same device is said to have been employed—the origin of which, after all, dates from remote Eastern times.”

“A much prettier story is that Rowena here drank hæel to Vortigern,” said Sir Fred: “and so pleased him that, like Herod of old in a less happy circumstance, he was ready to sacrifice the half of his kingdom to this fair-haired charmer.”

“Vortigern was evidently a man of impulse and impressions,” said the canon. “He gave the whole of Kent to Hengist—perhaps because he had no alternative. A few years went by and another drama took place: the murder of the Britons by the Saxons at a feast: reminding one of that earlier drama in Egyptian story, the Mameluke betrayal.”

“And what of Tong Castle?” asked Sir Fred.

“It has long since disappeared. We hear of it again in the pages of history about the time of the Conquest, and again in Richard II.’s time, as being in the hands of the Earl of March; but how far it was the same castle we know not. There are still a few fragments visible to take us back in imagination to the far-off days of Hengist and Rowena.”

The yacht was steaming rapidly through the waters. It was a memorable night. A wonderful pale light lingered low down in the west, finding a certain reflection upon the sea. Steaming eastward, the moon rose in front of us, casting her light across our path. Far out on our left the lightships flashed their beacons; here the *Girdler*, there the *Tongue*, opposite Sheerness the *Nore*. Other lights of fishing vessels gleamed low and soft. Every vestige of cloud had disappeared from the sky. As darkness deepened the stars came out, but pale and faint, eclipsed by the more brilliant moon. The night was so still and sultry that again nature seemed brooding up to a catastrophe. But the *Daphne*, moving rapidly, fanned us with her own breeze, making the deck cool and pleasant. Reclining in our lounge chairs, it was a time of calm and exquisite enjoyment; of wonderful mental and physical repose; to which one only seemed to dread a too-speedy termination.

“You appear very much in love with Sheppey, my dear canon,” remarked Sir Fred, as we rounded the point and left it behind us.

“I spent so many happy years in the neighbourhood,” was the reply. “For me it always held a charm, actual as well as historical. With every inch of the ground I am familiar, and spent many a delightful day fossil-hunting with hammer and chisel. The cottagers at Warden Point, living upon the beach, often find rare specimens of wood and the palm fruit: the ‘petrified fig,’ a dwarf plant common to marshy tracts.”

“That takes us back to long past ages,” said Sir Fred, “when there were strange creatures upon the earth.”

“Ay, and in our very midst,” returned the canon. “These waters, not always as free from danger as now, were the home of reptiles,

Crocodiles, sharks and turtles abounded. On the low-lying shores crept the wary boa-constrictor. There were wonderful creatures in those days; birds with teeth; man-eating trees; whilst other fruits beside the cocoa-nut yielded both meat and drink for human sustenance. Here once were spice-islands, in that far-off age; scented palms and spice-trees that loaded the air with perfume, and are now found only in tropic climes. To-day the island is rich in its



WEST DOORWAY.

way, and produces abundantly the fruits of the earth. If you are a lover of oysters you owe a debt of gratitude to Sheppey."

"But it seems full of virtues, this little neglected island," cried Sir Fred.

"And full of historical interest too," returned the canon. "The small mounds called *cotterels*, found in the south part of the island, are supposed to have been the burial-places of those hardy and adventurous Northmen, who invaded England so often in the 9th and

roth centuries. Sheppey seems to have been one of their favourite settling places—perhaps because they could quickly put out to sea on emergency."

"Men were wary even in those days," said Sir Fred. "They had an eye to their safety, and life was dear to them."

"The instincts of human nature do not change with the centuries," returned the canon. "We become more civilized, refined, fastidious; but our leading motives and ruling passions are the same now as in the days of Adam. So will it be. Man cannot change. If he passes into higher grooves of thought and nobler aims, he is still the son of that primæval forefather who brought sin and death into the world."

"The land disappears up that creek," said Sir Fred. "Is it not the mouth of the Swale?"

"Yes; and that tongue of land curling round is Shellness Point, where I have found many a fossil now lying amongst my collection. A very interesting stream, the Swale: delightful to navigate right round to the Medway, coming out by Queenborough. On your way you may run into lovely little creeks and backwaters. There is something very foreign about it, with its dykes and low-lying lands; with here and there a stork standing on one leg in the marshes, admiring its reflection and defying the influences of ague. One thinks of Holland, and it is quite as much an English Holland as its counterpart on the Essex shores; strangely unfamiliar and picturesque. One feels in a new world, so utterly different is it from one's ordinary life and surroundings."

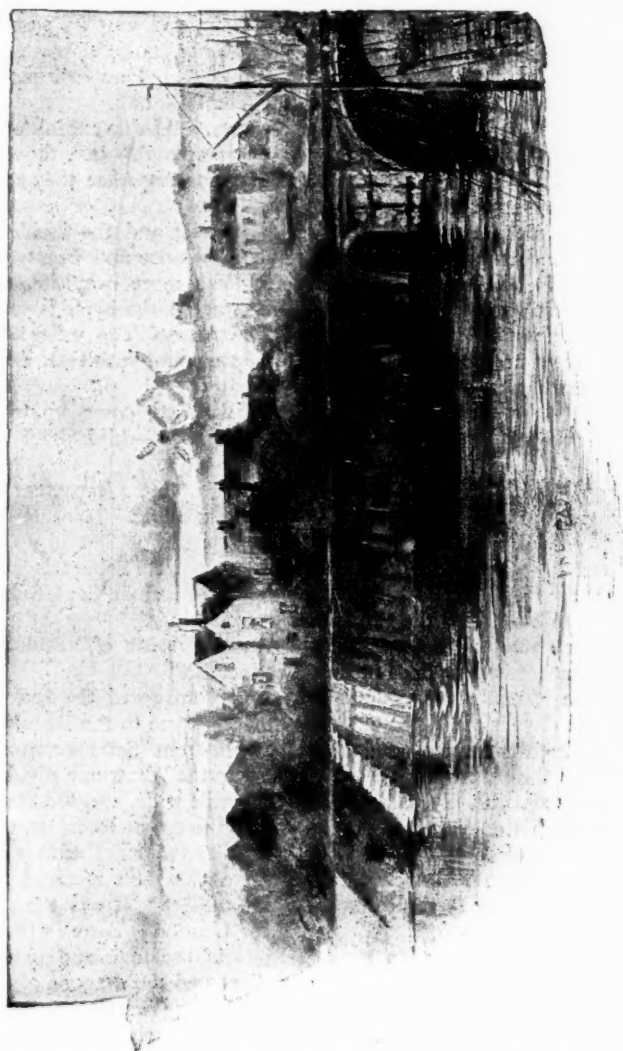
"I must make a note of this," cried Sir Fred. "A new sensation in these days is worth a Jew's ransom. It shall be our next voyage of discovery."

"Then must you take a smaller craft than the *Daphne*, Sir Fred. Yet in the old days the Swale seems to have been the usual way taken by ships bound for the Thames. When the Northmen wintered in the island they would bring their fleet of 'dragons' up here for the long cold months and dark days, finding safe anchorage from the storms of winter. Those were great days for Sandwich, too, which took much of the continental traffic. Here was Tong Castle, close by the King's Ferry, where the marshes are at their worst and the river is narrowest. Tong, Milton, Queenborough—Kingborough, as it once was—were all great places."

"And all have faded with the light of other days—to quote that sentimental song," said Sir Fred.

"It is the common lot," returned the canon. "Leaves have their time to fall. Vessels of fair size, up to 200 tons and more, can still navigate the Swale, but rarely do so. They look like some huge monster advancing to devour the land with portentous outspread wings. It is an invasion; one feels they have no right to ruffle the serenity of these quiet reaches. The fishing boats of the

neighbourhood that congregate here, look far more in their element and far more picturesque. It was in the Swale, as we learn from a letter



ON THE MEDWAY.

written by Gregory the Great to the Patriarch of Alexandria, that Augustine, after the conversion of Ethelbert, baptized 10,000 Saxons on Christmas Day, 597."

"An impossible number," remarked Sir Fred; "or he must have had many helpers, and taken a number of them collectively."

At this moment a flock of birds soared over our heads in quick flight. Something had evidently disturbed them, and as they passed into the moonlight, their dark outlines were clearly marked.

"Not gulls," said Sir Fred, "and not wild duck. They look more like cormorants with those long necks outstretched."

"And yet it is singular," returned the canon. "I don't think one sees them very much in these waters; and cormorants fly low, though strong and rapid on the wing. It is difficult to say what they are, and they haven't uttered a cry to guide us."

The birds passed out of sight, wheeling inland; and the incident was forgotten. It only served to bring out the silence and beauty of the hour. No Eastern night could have been more exquisite, no tropical atmosphere more balmy. We only wanted the spice islands of old to spring up and fill the air with perfume. The water was smooth as a painted ocean; the outlines of the coast with their dark shadows were almost as visible as by day.

"We are only passing away from one island to come up with another," said Sir Fred. "Goodbye to Sheppey—drink hael to Thanet."

"A very different island," returned the canon; "more important as embracing a larger area; and more historically valuable. The interest of Sheppey has all but disappeared; it lies in tradition, bound up in vellum archives; but a great deal of the interest of Thanet is still visible, especially if we allow it for our purpose to include Canterbury. St. Augustine has linked the two inseparably together."

"I never could make out what the island consists of," said Sir Fred; "what territory it does or does not include."

"Because it really is an island no longer," answered the canon. "In the old days it embraced all the land from Sarre to the Reculver and the North Foreland on one side, and from Sarre down to Sandwich on the other. In the early centuries the Wantsume divided it from the mainland. It was one third of a mile wide, and the Stour passed through the Wantsume on its way to the sea at Reculver, the old Roman fortress. The Wantsume stretched from Reculver to Richborough, another Roman fortress, where Ethelbert received St. Augustine after their first meeting at Ebbe's Fleet. It was the sea passage used by the Danish ships bound for London. Sarre in those days was the great ferry used for passing from the mainland to the island. Once upon a time the Roman galleys and the dragons of the Northmen crowded the Wantsume; but when the waters dried up, Thanet ceased to be an island. It has all changed since then. The sea has encroached, and still encroaches."

"How does Thanet come by its name?" asked Sir Fred. "What does it mean? I suppose it is some old Saxon word?"

"Yes; it comes from *Tene*, a beacon, and refers to the watch-fires



lighted on the coast to give notice of the approach of friend or foe. In the days of the Britons it was called *Ruim*, a headland. It was then overgrown with forests—now trees are the exception. Much corn was also grown; it was rich and fruitful, and no reptile, it was said, could live upon the island."

"As was said of the holy ground at Glastonbury," remarked Sir Fred; "and as was once said of Ireland. Superstition again. We see it everywhere; in all ages and amongst all people. It seems inherent in human nature."

"The people of Thanet long remained rude and uncivilised," continued the canon. "In those days the island was remote, leading to nowhere. This was still more so when the Wantsume dried up and the Danish ships could no longer make it their waterway to London. The people of Thanet became a race apart, tilling the ground and fishing the sea. Twice a year they made voyages to the North Sea, bringing back cargoes of cod, which they dried after the manner of the Northmen—strong Danes and Norwegians. They traded much with Iceland in the way of fish. The voyages over



THE MEDWAY.

the men would furl their sails, leave their boats, and turn to the fields. Having stored the harvest of the sea, they sought the harvest of the earth. Thus they lived on from year to year, from sire to son."

"I wonder how they fared in those journeys up north," said Sir Fred. "What endurances they had; what gales were encountered, what lives lost; how often boats went out and were never heard of again. The seas must have been as treacherous and uncertain then as now, and their vessels less capable of fighting with winds and waves."

"Of course there were accidents," returned the canon. "Vessels were shipwrecked and lives were lost; but the men were a hardy race—far beyond anything we dream of in the nineteenth century: though we still have some fine fellows amongst us."

"We are not altogether degenerate," laughed Sir Fred. "A little leaven of the Ancient Briton and Anglo-Saxon still lurks amongst us. I hold a brief for my country. We are making way; have passed Whitstable, and there comes Herne Bay—reminding me of an incident that occurred the other day. I was going down to Seven-oaks, and the train stopped at Herne Hill. A little old lady sat

opposite to me—a charming little old lady in a coal-scuttle bonnet and the most refined of faces, looking very much as if she had come out of Noah's Ark. The porters called out the station and she looked anxiously from the window. 'Herne Hill—Herne Hill,' she said; but I don't see the Bay. Pray, sir, do you?' Then I explained that a good part of the county separated the hill from the bay; and that though both bore the same name, like rival houses they had no connexion with each other. 'Ah, well!' said she, 'you must excuse my ignorance, sir. I am not much of a traveller and always hated geography. In my day it was the use of the globes; and our governess would take us first to the terrestrial and then to the celestial, and twirl them round and round until I have many a time turned sick and giddy. I never could make out how the heavens, which appear concave to us, could be convex on the globe. You see, sir, I belong to a past generation'—I should think she did!—'I am long past eighty; and when I was a girl we did our travelling leisurely and respectably, posting in our own carriage-and-four, even though the journey might be from John o' Groat's to the Land's End. I shall never grow reconciled to these loud and vulgar trains, where people knock up against you, and every one is in a breathless hurry. Oh, it is a vulgar age indeed, and all courtliness has died out. Grace and dignity have been laid aside, like the minuet. It is wonderful how, when people grow old, there seems to be no place for them on earth; nobody wants them; they are best out of it.' So she went on, highly amusing me until we parted company."

"I incline to agree with your fellow-traveller," said the canon, "and always hope I may not live to be very old. If I might choose, it would be to die in harness, before I become a cumberer of the earth. But our times are not in our own hands and we don't know what is best for us. You mentioned Whitstable just now, Sir Fred. Were you ever there? You know it is famous for its oysters and divers; not the birds so called, but the men who go below and inspect the wonders of the deep; recovering many a treasure from the bottom of the sea. We are hardly on classic ground here, but there was once an ancient town, and probably a Roman, where now beat the waves. Roman fragments are often brought up by the fishermen, at the cost of a broken net. Have you ever seen the white-sailed dredging boats at work?"

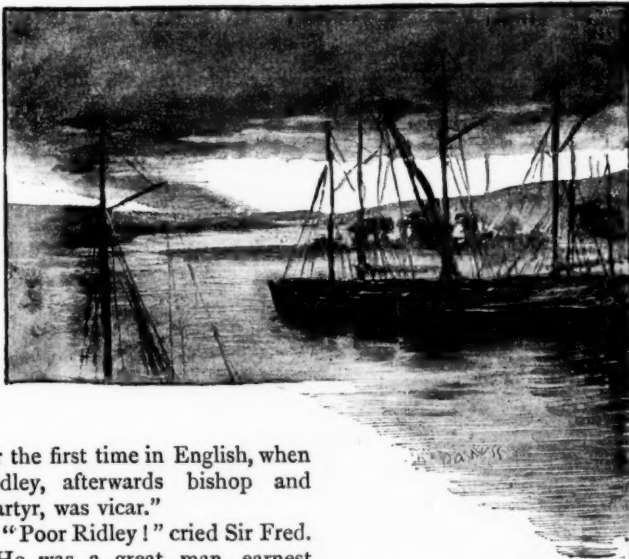
"Never," replied Sir Fred. "I never set foot in Whitstable in my life, imagining it the *ultima thule* of all that is dull and uninteresting."

"Ah, but the dredging boats are picturesque, and you have no doubt often enjoyed the result of their labours. It is the home of the oyster par excellence; a royal breed of ancient pedigree. There is a great natural bed stretching for forty miles between Shoreham and Havre—but they are not royal. Here in the old days came the Dutch for their supplies—now they send them to us; and if

you read your Juvenal, you will find that Nero and Domitian both loved and obtained British oysters. Many a feast in the Golden House and the Alban Villa would have been thought imperfect without them."

"So that compared with oysters we are all mushrooms," laughed Sir Fred. "No wonder he is so much honoured. I willingly allow him precedence. Does Herne Bay share in his favours?"

"No. He is exclusive, this royal oyster. Herne Bay was once the home of the herons, but they have long since departed to other scenes. They are shy birds, frequenting desolate marshes and lonely shores. Thanet has become too popular for them. Herne Bay is now famous for nothing in particular, unless it be a certain dead level of monotony. In its church the *Te Deum* is said to have been sung



for the first time in English, when Ridley, afterwards bishop and martyr, was vicar."

"Poor Ridley!" cried Sir Fred.

"He was a great man, earnest and consistent, which is more than can be said for many of those bishops, who, subscribing to the Reformation, turned to Mary when she became Queen, and again became Protestant when Elizabeth ruled. He was too good a man to die at the age of fifty-five. But in his zeal he went too far, and I often think that he helped poor Jane Grey to her fate. A little less openly opposed to Mary, both as princess and queen, and Elizabeth might have had the benefit of his wise counsels, the Church the support of his sound theology."

"It was not to be, Sir Fred. And after all, it is something to stand out in history as he does: a man who never wavered and was

not to be moved by bribe or threat or fear of death. See, we are passing the Reculver, with its twin spires rising up in the moonlight. Alas, they are modern. Every vestige of the Ancient Regulbium has disappeared: one of the three fortresses built by the Romans: Regulbium, Richborough, and Lymne. The outer walls of Richborough stand to this day, crumbling, ivy-grown, picturesque: the most perfect Roman remain in England. The enclosed area was vast, the fortress well-nigh impregnable. To this day the mortar cementing the stones seems harder than flint: imperishable."

"But how bleak and desolate the surrounding country," said Sir Fred. "How the wintry winds sweep the plains and find you out. The only time I visited Richborough, was on a certain day in February; with skies grey and cold, the boisterous wind in the east. I shall never forget how my enthusiasm for the ruin and the Romans who built the fortress went down to zero; and I envied the fowls roosting within the walls, apparently in warm and comfortable quarters."

"No doubt the climate is harsh on occasion," said the canon; "the east wind sweeping across the land losing its sea-softness. But there are times and seasons when everything is delightful. The country may be bleak, but it is not barren. Standing on Richborough, in the distance you see the outlines of Sandwich, its windmills and church towers. The town is still crowded with old-world outlines and interesting remains; but its glory departed when the Wantsume dried up and turned the waterway into land. Here came Wilfrid, following in the footsteps of Augustine. Here Ethelred collected his fleet to oppose the landing of the Danes. At the beginning of the eleventh century, of all English harbours it was the most important. But the sea has retired. On the river outside the town, you now see vessels of small tonnage, on which the quaint old gateway seems to bestow a melancholy smile. The port was given by Canute to the Canterbury Monastery, and when an exchange was made the town undertook to clothe the monks, and give them a yearly toll of 40,000 herrings."

"Was it not near here that Thomas à Becket lay concealed after his flight from Northampton?" asked Sir Fred.

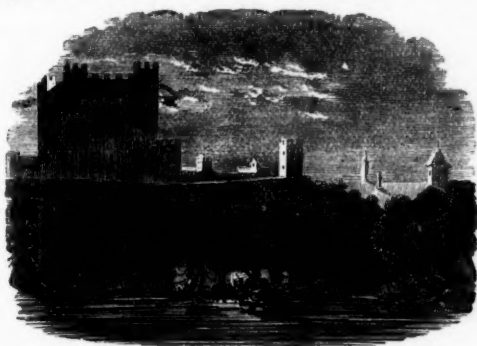
"Ay," replied the canon; "at Eastry; where once Ethelbert had his favourite palace. Becket embarked from Sandwich, and there returned when all danger was over. This was in 1170, though I believe the date has been disputed. It is of no moment. He landed on a Tuesday, and on a Tuesday is said to have occurred all the great events of his life."

"That savours of superstition," laughed Sir Fred.

"Nay, I am quoting facts, not searching into causes. Before that year came to an end, the terrible tragedy had taken place in Canterbury Cathedral. It occurred at the hour when the day was dying and the vast building was growing dark and mysterious ;

only the rays of a few solitary lamps like distant stars shedding around their dim, religious light. I see the whole scene before me. The sudden inroad of the assassins. The Archbishop, still robed and mitred, taken unawares; backing against a pillar, and fighting for life; but, strong man though he was, resisting in vain. And then the fall; and the pavement stained with the life-blood of the victim: since Cæsar's fall the one we might almost say that stands out most in history. But I am giving you a whole chapter in that history!"

"A fitting subject for the Night-Watches at sea," returned Sir Fred, "where we are surrounded by a strange element. The silence of the night, the dark cliffs with their sleeping outlines, the wide expanse of ocean, the pale moon and the travelling stars—everything about us suggests weirdness and mystery—death in life—eternity: I



ROCHESTER BY MOONLIGHT.

hardly know what. The thrilling story of Becket's murder gains force and power in such a scene."

"Yet will I spare you further details, Sir Fred. You must know them well, if they have not escaped your memory. This scene affects me differently, perhaps because I am nearer the Borderland than you. To me it is full of peace and beauty. All is harmony. If at all it suggests death—I catch your meaning—it is death without its terrors: as the mere passage to an eternity where everything is lovely and of good report."

"Then let us return to scenes less tragic than Becket's murder," said Sir Fred. "Go back to the earlier days of that eventful year. Tell us of his landing at Sandwich in pomp and pride after his escape. How was he received by the people?"

"With all due honours, Sir Fred; the hero of the hour; his triumph absolute. Becket knew how to awe the people—none better. Little recked he of the fate in store for him; the suspended sword; the shadow of death even then pursuing. A great proces-

sion conducted him to Canterbury, singing the hymn sung when Charlemagne entered Rome, after delivering the Church from the Lombards: *Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*. Everything promised well for the future, and if Becket's heart swelled with pride, perhaps he may be forgiven."

"All this adds very much to the interest of Sandwich," said Sir Fred. "I fear we too often forget our history when visiting these old towns."

"It is only one point of interest out of many," returned the canon. "Sandwich is full of historical records. Richard Cœur de Lion landed here after the Austrian disaster, and went barefoot to Canterbury to return thanks for his deliverance. Here Edward III. landed after taking Calais. Several times the place was taken and burnt and the people were massacred; only to recover rapidly from its misfortunes. The largest vessels of all nations crowded to its port. Never was its prosperity greater than at the beginning of the fifteenth century; yet when the bells rang in the sixteenth century, all was virtually over. This Liverpool of the Middle Ages had become almost a dead city—so rapid was its decline. In 1572, Elizabeth visited her decayed port, and it must have been a pretty scene. The streets were decorated with garlands of vine leaves, and their shadows cast by the sun played upon the quaint outlines of the houses. Platforms were erected on which Dutch and English children were seated, like Gretchen, spinning yarn. A charming picture. And the capricious monarch, it is recorded, was in her happiest mood. The history of Sandwich and its neighbourhood would make a delightful volume."

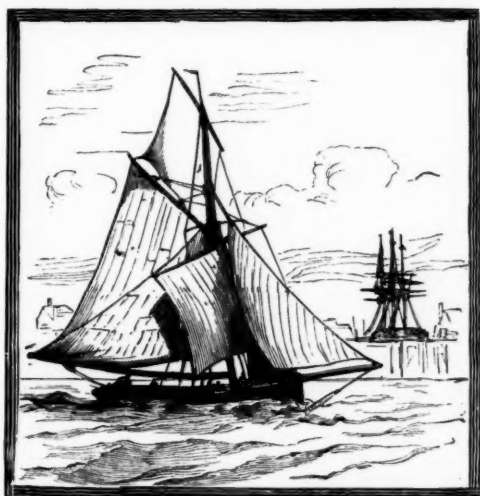
"But we are a long way from Sandwich," laughed Sir Fred. "You are in advance of the *Daphne*, my dear canon. In your antiquarian zeal you have taken a long flight across country—in the wake of those birds, perhaps, that we lately watched turning inland."

"The whole country round is such warp and woof of history," returned the canon, smiling, "that you can hardly mention any one part without finding it in some way connected with the most remote point of the island. Thus Reculver led to Richborough, and Richborough to Sandwich. No wonder Reculver could not keep us. It is far from possessing the interest of its sister fortress. Few ancient walls are standing here as at Richborough, after nearly 2,000 years have turned them grey and weather-stained. The ancient fortress covered eight acres. The Romans had a wonderful idea of space; nothing small and narrow entered into their conceptions. Here Ethelbert came after he had been baptized by Augustine, and built him a palace with the ruins of the fortress; having given his own palace at Canterbury to Augustine to found the new cathedral. It was said that he was buried here, but he was really buried at St. Augustine's, Canterbury. Egbert gave up Reculver to found a minster in 669; and in 949 Eadred gave the monastery to Christ



Church, Canterbury. You will hardly believe that the ancient church of Reculver, which stood within the fortress in the early days: a monument, as has been said, 'recording the downfall of paganism and the triumph of Christianity:' was deliberately pulled down in 1809. There are no Goths and Vandals equal to the English. The vicarage was turned into a public-house. The west towers, now visible from the sea, were built by the Trinity Board. They are ugly, but distinctive."

So talking, the canon beguiled the time, carrying us vividly into the days of the past, until we felt face to face with the forgotten centuries. Presently we found ourselves passing Margate. A fleet of fishing boats were scattered upon the waters. The stone pier with its lighthouse stood out clearly in the moonlight. In the small



DREDGING BOAT.

harbour we traced the outlines of a few picturesque barges, and some equally uninteresting colliers. The clay cliffs had yielded to the more beautiful white chalk, against which, alas, the sea beats with resistless force.

"There, at least, you can weave no romance," laughed Sir Fred. "I have always heard that Margate is the ugliest place in England."

"I fear it is so," returned the canon; "and the surrounding country hasn't a feature to recommend it. There is hardly a tree to be seen anywhere. But to make up for all this, it is the very finest air in England. Facing the north, you get your breezes straight from the North Pole. The strange thing is that everyone imagines it cold in winter, whereas it is warmer than other places. Its historical interest is limited. In ancient times it was called Meregate, from

mere, a stream: this gradually becoming Margate. It consisted of a village called St. John's, of which the old church still remains—restored, of course. But I can remember it very quaint and picturesque, in the days when my friend Canon Bateman was vicar—one of the finest preachers I ever listened to."

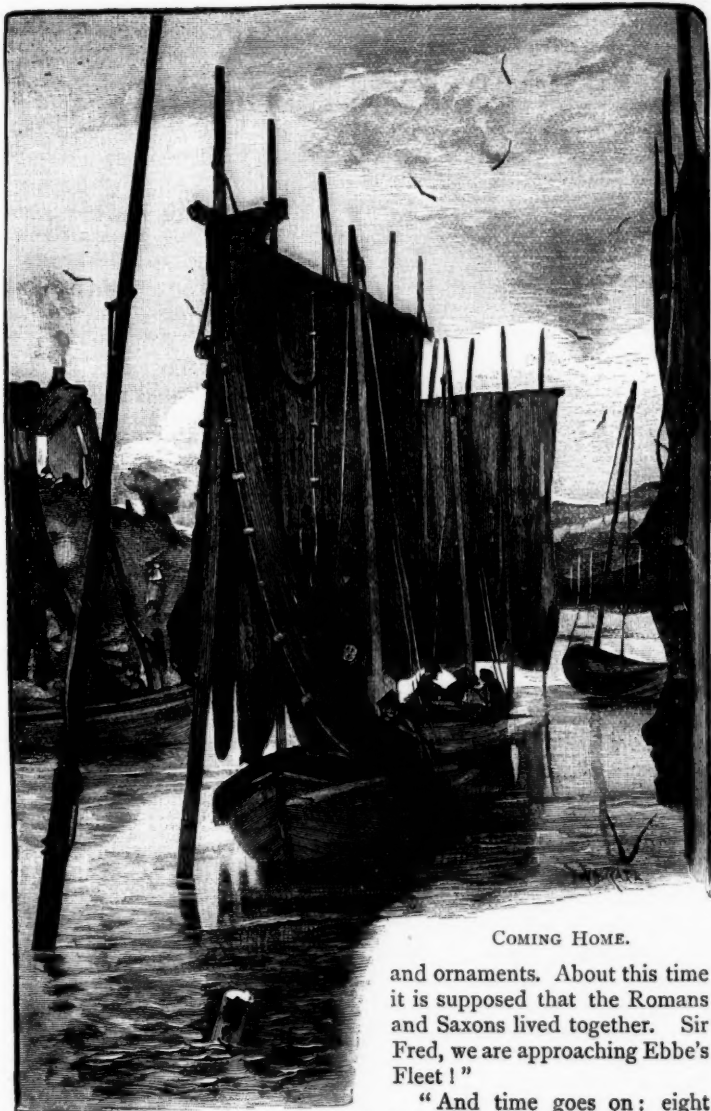
"I have heard my father speak of him," said Sir Fred. "They occasionally met at one time; and I remember my father's admiration for his sermons. He was much the elder of the two, and they first became known to each other through Bishop Wilson of Calcutta, whose daughter Canon Bateman married."

"He did," replied the canon. "And for his sake I have always felt an affection for Margate—though he was a man of curious temper. As I have said, it has not much in the way of history to recommend it. There was a pier here in the days of Henry VIII. The Elector Palatine embarked here with his wife, the Princess Elizabeth. Here William III. would embark when going back to Holland, and the great Marlborough frequently used it. There stands the North Foreland, showing out white and beautiful in the moonlight. In early days it was nothing but a wooden erection to warn ships off the Goodwins. Then came another, on which a coal fire blazed away—picturesque but suggestive of barbarism. It was off here that the great sea-fight took place: Prince Rupert and Monk against De Ruyter and De Witt. The English fleet numbered 50 vessels, the Dutch 80—the latter gaining the battle. De Witt bore witness to our bravery. 'They may be killed,' said he, 'but they will not be conquered.' When the next battle was fought, it was the turn of the English to win."

"Here comes Broadstairs," said Sir Fred; "and yonder are the lights of Ramsgate. We approach the scene of our impromptu drama."

"We ought to lower our topsail, if we carried one, in passing Broadstairs," said the canon: "as the ships all did in the days of old to the famous chapel of 'Our Lady of Broadstairs.' It takes its name from the width of the sea-passage, protected by strong doors and a massive arch, some of which yet remains. Large fleets would sail hence every year, to the North Sea, just as they did from Sheppey. Ramsgate goes far back before the times of the Romans, but to me is only interesting as the home of Pugin the prince of architects; who is greatly responsible for the Houses of Parliament, with which you, Sir Fred, are better acquainted than I. Here he built him a house, and a small Roman Catholic church that he said was finest of all his works—probably because he did as he pleased about it. He had a passion for the sea, and said that it and Christian architecture were the only things worth living for. At the back of Ramsgate is the hill of Osengal or Oxengal, where the first Saxon settlers were buried in graves dug in the chalk. The remains discovered belong to the heathen period, the fifth and sixth

centuries. They were buried in their best garments, with their arms



COMING HOME.

and ornaments. About this time it is supposed that the Romans and Saxons lived together. Sir Fred, we are approaching Ebbe's Fleet ! "

"And time goes on: eight bells have struck. It is past the witching hour, my dear canon."

At that instant the engines ceased to throb and the pilot came up. "I have taken her in as near as I dare, Sir Fred," he said; "from here landing will be an easy matter."

The scene was very impressive, the moonlight making it almost clear as day. In a few minutes we were rapidly approaching the shore, and having landed passed up the cliffs. The night was calm and still; one almost seemed to penetrate the darkness; the moonbeams glittering upon the water played about the yacht.

"In what sort of a vessel did Augustine come over?" mused the canon. "Something very different from the *Daphne*, Sir Fred."

"A Roman galley, probably," returned Sir Fred, "with massive prow and broad helm and picturesque sails spread to the wind: a vessel of dignity, befitting the freight she bore: a rich argosy indeed, eclipsing Jason and the Golden Fleece. Can you not see the vessel approaching in imagination, Augustine and his followers landing just below here, where we have now landed ourselves; then winding slowly and solemnly up the sea gate, Ethelbert awaiting them under the sacred oak, surrounded by his men of war."

"Yet it was a council of peace that was to be held," said the canon. "What were his thoughts as he saw that grave man, that magnificent presence approaching, taller than the tallest warrior present? In front of him they carried a silver cross; on a raised frame a picture of Christ. As they went they chanted a solemn Litany commending themselves and the Saxons to divine grace and guidance. Then the two great men met; Ethelbert and Augustine; the king rising involuntarily to receive his majestic visitor. His fair Saxon hair fell below his helmet; his tall, strong form was also commanding; in him also, Augustine recognised majesty and goodness innate. His heart went out to the Saxon king then and there. In Ethelbert he saw a great soul, and already felt the success of his mission assured. Even in that first moment his reward came to him. The meeting was held in the open air, perhaps to counteract any influences of evil or magic."

"A suspicion hardly worthy of Ethelbert," said Sir Fred. "He was surely one who knew no fear."

"Perhaps not," returned the canon; "but he had to think of his followers. They at least were not in advance of their time, had no pretensions to the great mind of the king. Superstition was rife amongst them. Even Ethelbert may have had some doubts as to the end and aim, the power possessed by this bold missionary. But all vanished as mist before the sun; for when the interview was over we see that wonderful procession, headed by the silver cross, slowly passing across the country to the fortress of Richborough. Already the king had decided to honour the missionary, who, whether his message were true or false, was a great man."

"I have often wondered Ethelbert did not take Augustine to

Eastry, his own favourite place, where they would have enjoyed more quiet and seclusion, more opportunity for conference—that same Eastry in which Wolsey took refuge some five centuries later.”

“Perhaps he felt the fortress the more fitting spot for what he instinctively realised was the commencement of a crusade,” replied the canon. “The quieter charms of Eastry might follow. There may also have been a little pride affecting his decision. Augustine who had come from Rome should see that here was a castrum worthy of Rome herself. So the procession slowly passed across the country, the king and Augustine walking side by side, the cross held before them glittering in the sun as though touched by a holy fire. Already the king felt a strange new life awakening within him; a still small voice suggesting that the Pagan past was over.”

“And here they first met,” said Sir Fred; “perhaps under that very tree,” pointing to a solitary oak standing out in the moonlight. “Another tree may have been there in those days, just as a new church is often built on the site of an old one.”

“At any rate, it will suit our purpose to imagine it,” smiled the canon. “And to think of the place as it was then, not as it is now. No house or hut was visible. It was far more wooded; a wilder, more barbarous air distinguished it. But no night then could have been more beautiful than this; weird, mysterious, silent; this landscape shorn of its trees, this broad plain sleeping in the moonlight!”

It might indeed have been a world dead and deserted as the moon that sailed above us. Not a thing stirred. Not a dog bayed, not a light glimmered upon the earth. But turning to the sea, all was changed. That lay shimmering and sparkling under the moonbeams like a world of life and motion. The lights of the *Daphne* shone out steadily. Further out were other lights belonging to a fleet of fishing-boats, too distant to disturb one's sense of solitude and repose. It was a perfect experience of its kind. Turning inland, we reached the tree Sir Fred had pointed to; fancied it some Druidical oak, assisting at heathen rites and ceremonies. We stood listening and watching; watching the moon flooding earth and sea with her light; listening to the intense silence.

And once more we were startled, as we had been startled in the Thames at our first leaving, some twenty-four hours ago. It is a strange thing to record, yet really happened.

Suddenly, without warning, there rose up with shrill, prolonged scream, one knew not whence, yet close at hand, the body of a great bird—if bird it was. One might almost have been forgiven for doubting it. The cry was wild and portentous. It wheeled in the air, hovering, one might have fancied, over the *Daphne*: then with a wild and final scream took flight onwards, as though hieing back to the reaches of the Thames.

"Strange," said Sir Fred; "strange! What can it be? Is it really an omen, as the old pilot would have us think?"

His voice was almost subdued. The witching hour, the solemn night itself, could not be otherwise than impressive with its weirdness. It was a thrilling moment. The canon was the least moved; outwardly and inwardly calm.

"If herons were here I should say it was a heron," he remarked: "but it had not the cry of a heron. It was more the melancholy cry of a curlew, a hundred times magnified and a hundred times prolonged. It must be some strange bird visiting our shores. As for an omen—I am going fast down hill, Sir Fred; I have had my experiences of life; and I tell you there are no such things as omens."

"It is well I have no Irish blood in my veins," laughed Sir Fred, "or I should prove to you that that was a banshee. Of course I did not ask the question seriously, but at the first moment I really was startled—the repetition of the incident was so remarkable. We shall find our old pilot on the verge of brain-fever."

"And there may lurk the evil," smiled the canon; "if it unnerves him for his work. But your captain is a young man, made of sterner stuff; his nerves will never fail him. Well, we have had our landing and our experience——"

"And our drama in one act," laughed Sir Fred, "with a banshee for Greek chorus. You were about to propose our return: all things considered I will second you. To the shore, then. We shall soon have daybreak upon us."

As we neared the *Daphne*, the pilot awaited us with grave and solemn looks.

"Did you hear and see that, Mr. Hurst?" asked Sir Fred.

"I did, sir," was the quaking reply in double-bass tones.

"And what did you think of it? Is it a bad omen? Are we to go straight back whence we came?"

"In the wake of the bird, Sir Fred? Never. I look upon it as a good, not an evil omen. The bird has turned his back upon us—a bird of ill-omen sure enough. But his reverence has been too much for it. I hoped and thought it would be so. The powers of good are ever stronger than the powers of evil once they conflict with each other. It has gone back to its haunts—let it go. Had it flown onwards, no earthly power would force me to accompany you. You might as well have asked me to commit murder. But there was no mistaking that backward flight, that scream of disappointed prey. I think we are safe now; and I am thankful."

"I am glad to hear it," laughed Sir Fred. "What a change in the moral atmosphere! All's well that ends well. See, dawn breaks in the east. My dear canon, come down and refresh the inner man, so tried by omens and portents and vigils in the Night-Watches; and then, like the chough and crow, we'll hie to roost!"



## STRATFORD'S LOVE STORY.

BY SYDNEY C. GRIER, AUTHOR OF "PEACE WITH HONOUR."

## CHAPTER I.

"LET us have another sett. Where's Vera?"

"Vera? Oh, she's gone off to Mrs. Rowcroft as usual. There she is," and the speaker pointed with his racquet to a white figure crossing the park in the direction of the vicarage. "You come and play instead of her, Etta."

Etta, the eldest married sister, complied willingly enough, and Vera, turning back to look at the tennis-court, saw that her place had been supplied. Relieved from her fear that Frank would rush after her and bring her back when he discovered that she had stolen away in the pause between the games, she walked on more quietly, and, entering the vicarage garden, passed in at one of the long French windows of the drawing-room, to be received with an exclamation of delight by a lady lying on an invalid couch.

"Is that you, dear child? I have been wondering whether you would be able to come."

"I thought there might be something I could do for you," said Vera, "so I came away after we had had three setts. You can't really call that deserting Frank, can you, Mrs. Rowcroft? Now, what can I do?"

"There are countless things," said Mrs. Rowcroft, with an anxious smile; "it is at times like this that I get fidgety, Vera, for one can't trust the servants to do everything, and I am tied here. Egerton is coming by the 4.45 train, and I should be so much obliged if you would see whether his room looks nice."

"And whether he has soap, and matches, and candles, and ink, and writing-paper?" asked Vera. "Do you think he will be very particular about that sort of thing?"

"I don't know, dear. Of course, he has been accustomed to roughing it just lately, but I daresay he will have a great deal of writing to do; and I don't want him to miss anything, for he must feel almost like a stranger. My only brother—just think of it, Vera—and I haven't seen him for twenty years—and we two are the only ones left out of the family. I was so much in India, of course, and he has been moved about from Eusebia to Czarigrad, and sent on missions to other places, and lastly to Ethiopia, and so we have never met. And men's letters are such unsatisfactory things, that I really know more about him from the papers. Why, we should never

have heard of all that happened at Kubbet-ul-Haj if that American journalist had not chanced to be there !”

“No,” said Vera, drawing a deep breath. “Oh, Mrs. Rowcroft, I think I should almost die of joy if I had a brother like Mr. Stratford ! It is not only his having done such a splendid thing, but I think it is so good of him to remain faithful to the memory of that lady who died. Most people forget so dreadfully soon.”

“Yes, eighteen years is a pretty fair test of fidelity,” said Mrs. Rowcroft thoughtfully. “But if you are making a hero out of Egerton, Vera, I am afraid you will be disappointed, as you generally are, aren't you ? Heroes have a way of turning out regrettably human nowadays. But will you see about the ink and the matches before we talk any more ? Oh, and don't forget a few flowers in the blue vase. I didn't dare tell Mary Jane to attempt that.”

“No, she would have arranged a nice solid nosegay of sweet-williams and Canterbury bells,” said Vera, as she shut the door. Presently she returned, after a careful survey of the room above.

“I think there is everything there, Mrs. Rowcroft, except sealing-wax. Diplomats use a great deal of sealing-wax, don't they ? May I put some of that lovely pale blue, which you have in your davenport, to match the room, and a little blue taper in the taper-stand ?”

“My dear child, you are too considerate ! I'm afraid your delicate scheme of colour will be wasted on a man. Fancy official documents sealed with pale blue wax ! Don't you think we had better supply Egerton with a dozen pieces or so of the best red tape ? That ought to be useful to him, at any rate. But by all means give him the pretty taper and sealing-wax, if you think it makes the room look more complete. Were you able to find any flowers of just the right shade ?”

“Yes, there were plenty of white ones, and I found some nemophila, which matched the paint on the walls exactly,” said Vera, with perfect seriousness, not noticing the laughter in her friend's voice.

“Egerton ought to be very much obliged to you for all the trouble you have taken, Vera.”

“Oh, Mrs. Rowcroft—*trouble !* As if anything could be too good for such a splendid man ! I wonder whether Mr. Rowcroft will recognise him at the station ? I'm sure I should know him at once. You will be looking so proud when I see you in church on Sunday that I shall be almost afraid to wait and speak to you afterwards, but I don't mind. I should be angry if you were not proud of him.”

“Vera—you absurd child ! Everybody is not quite so given to hero-worship as you are. But where are you going now ?”

“Oh, home, of course, unless there is anything else I can do. Oh, Mrs. Rowcroft”—recoiling as she approached the window—“there's the Homebury fly coming in at the gate !”

"Then Egerton must have missed Lucas and the pony-carriage. How very annoying!" cried Mrs. Rowcroft regretfully. "What a cold welcome for him! Vera, dear, should you very much mind meeting him at the front door? I am afraid he will feel it so unkind."

"Oh, please not," murmured Vera, turning pale and shrinking into the corner by the window. "He doesn't know me at all."

"No, of course not, but I thought—— Stay where you are, dear—listen," and the invalid raised her head as the sounds of bustle became audible in the hall. Vera emerged from her corner, and sat crouched on the rug beside her, trembling with excitement. In another moment she would behold the man who represented to her the embodiment of nineteenth century courage and chivalry. A year before, the whole Empire had been thrilled by the news that Egerton Stratford, left by the illness of his Chief in charge of the British Mission to Ethiopia, had voluntarily entered the palace at Kubbet-ul-Haj, where instant death apparently awaited him. The envoy's illness was due to poison administered by the Ethiopian Court, who had also succeeded in getting into their power a lady doctor, who had accompanied the Mission, and were now threatening to put her to death unless the treaty—a highly disadvantageous one to England—which they had drawn up were signed. In order to save the lady's life (she had since married another member of the Mission, a special friend of his), Mr. Stratford took his life in his hands, and gave himself up to the Ethiopians in her stead. Refusing to sign the treaty, he was threatened with death by torture, when the unequal strife had already continued for hours, but succeeded, by a singular combination of audacity and diplomacy, not only in effecting his own escape from his perilous position, but in bringing about a change of ministry in Ethiopia, and in getting the king to sign the treaty with which the Mission had been entrusted. In order that his Chief, whose illness prevented him from becoming acquainted with the real circumstances, might enjoy the credit of concluding the treaty, Mr. Stratford had made no official record of his exploit, but the special correspondent of a great American paper, the *Empire City Crier*, who had been despatched to Ethiopia to chronicle the progress of the Mission, and knew the whole story, had given the incident to the world, with the result, among other and more important ones, that Vera Branscombe had elected Mr. Stratford forthwith to the highest pedestal in her gallery of heroes—a collection which was the source of marvel and amusement to all her friends. She and Mrs. Rowcroft talked of him almost every day, and Vera envied her friend more than she could tell the possession of such a brother. And now she would see him!

"Mr. Stratford," said the maid's voice at the door, breaking in upon her meditations, and Vera saw a tall man with dark hair and moustache slightly tinged with grey, and a large thin nose. This

was the impression she received of her hero in the instant of his coming briskly into the room and kissing Mrs. Rowcroft. The next moment she awoke to the awful fact that he would proceed to speak to her. She had risen to her feet when the door opened, and while she stood unnoticed she wondered whether it would be possible to escape by the window, but Mrs. Rowcroft remembered her at once.

"Egerton," she said, "this is my little friend Vera Branscombe, my right hand in the house and the parish."

"Home for the holidays, I suppose?" said Mr. Stratford with a smile, holding out his hand kindly to the little plain girl who stood before him in her white dress, her face crimson and her great grey eyes dilated with fright.

"Is she afraid I am going to kiss her?" was the whimsical thought suggested to his mind by her look of terror, but a hearty laugh from Mrs. Rowcroft diverted his attention from Vera's face.

"You will make Vera your enemy for life, Egerton," she said. "Do you know that she came out last winter, and that it is more than a year since her last governess took her departure?"

"I humbly entreat Miss Branscombe's pardon," said Mr. Stratford, in accents which were labelled in Vera's admiring thoughts as courtly, "and I will venture to remind her that few ladies consider it a mortal insult to be imagined a year or two under their real age."

"No one can say that you don't know how to get out of a difficulty prettily, Egerton," said Mrs. Rowcroft. "Oh, here is the tea coming in. No, Vera, you are not to desert me. Is the wearied traveller to pour out his tea for himself?"

Vera retired blushing to the tea-tray, and having done her duty, sat silent, playing with a piece of bread and butter, and listening to her friend and Mr. Stratford as they talked. Presently, with a thrill of joy, she realised that Mrs. Rowcroft was leading the conversation round to the doings at Kubbet-ul-Haj, while her brother tried in vain to turn the subject. Mrs. Rowcroft was not to be baffled, and Mr. Stratford was compelled to give a short and gruff account of his experiences on that terrible day in the palace.

"I hate to talk about it!" he said. "They made an abominable fuss about the matter, but it was nothing but what any man in my position would have done. And then they go and rook the poor old Chief of all the credit he deserves, simply because he didn't happen to be there when the treaty was signed."

This was not at all Mrs. Rowcroft's view of the case, and she was on the point of entering an impetuous protest against it, but both she and her brother were startled by a voice from the other side of the room.

"Oh, please don't say that!" it said. "It sounds as if you were trying to make little of it, and it was such a splendid thing to do. And I am sure Sir Dugald Haigh would have hated to take the honour when he knew it was yours." Vera was standing up with shining eyes, intent on defending her hero against himself.

"You are very kind," said Mr. Stratford slowly, thinking that the little girl was not so very plain after all. Recalled to herself, Vera caught up her racquet hurriedly.

"I really must go now, Mrs. Rowcroft," she said. "It is getting late, and papa doesn't like me to be out after dusk. I shall be at the school to-morrow as usual to see to the needlework."

"You will allow me to escort you home?" said Mr. Stratford, rising.

"Oh no, thank you—I couldn't think of giving you the trouble—please don't!" said Vera, in genuine alarm. The prospect of a *tête-à-tête* walk with her hero, a walk in which it would be incumbent upon her to make polite conversation for his benefit—was too dreadful to contemplate, and she lost her head completely.

"Excuse me, but I could not think of letting you go alone," said Mr. Stratford: "I believe you live at the Park, do you not? Then by what I noticed as I came, you must pass through a dark lane, which can't be a very pleasant locality for a young lady alone in the twilight."

"Oh, I am not a bit afraid—there's never any one there—please don't think of coming," gasped Vera, but Mr. Stratford only went into the hall to get his hat. The moment he was gone, she saw a chance of escape, and bestowing a hasty kiss on Mrs. Rowcroft, dashed through the open window and fled like the wind before her friend could stop her. Mr. Stratford, re-entering the room, saw only a flying white figure, behind which the gate presently clanged in the distance, while his sister broke into helpless laughter at the sight of his astonished face.

"Well," he said, calmly enough, "I suppose I may as well put back my hat, Alice, for your young friend seems a veritable Atalanta, and that attack of fever in Khemistan on my way home has crippled me so much that I fear I should never catch her up. It wouldn't be much good for me to arrive panting some minutes after her, and I might not improbably be taken for a tramp from whom she was escaping. But what have I done to terrify her so completely? I didn't know I was such an ogre."

"She is fearfully shy, poor child," said Mrs. Rowcroft, casting about to discover what excuse she could offer for Vera's unconventional behaviour. "I fancy she is rather a disappointment to her mother. The Branscombes are such a fine family, and the elder girls have all married well almost as soon as they came out, but Vera is not in the least like the rest. She is the youngest, and there are several years between her and the next sister, so that she has grown up very much alone, which is just the worst thing for her. She ought to have been sent to school to knock about a little among other girls, and it has been a distinct disadvantage to her to be alone in the schoolroom with an elderly governess, who was perfectly satisfied as long as she was quiet. Her disposition is peculiar, but I believe she will make a fine woman some day."

"Possibly," but Mr. Stratford's voice scarcely sounded as though he was attending. "Does she remind you of anyone, Alice? No? Not of—Hélène? It is her eyes, I think."

"It never struck me," said Mrs. Rowcroft slowly, casting her memory back with something of an effort to the Belgian girl whom she had once looked forward to receiving as a sister-in-law, and who had been carried off by an epidemic upon the day fixed for her wedding. "But then I only saw Hélène's photograph, and no doubt that did not give a good idea of her."

"It did not. I destroyed all the photographs I had of her, for I preferred my own recollection of her face. There was no special beauty in it without the expression, but that made all the difference. I must study Miss Branscombe's face more carefully and see whether there is really any likeness. Very likely it will fade when I come to know her better."

"For pity's sake, Egerton, leave that poor child alone! She will be frightened to death if she sees you looking at her—studying her, indeed! You need not be cruel to her, even if she is painfully young and shy."

"My dear Alice, the ogre theory evidently finds favour with you. I assure you that I will do my best to diminish the feeling of terror with which Miss Branscombe is pleased to regard me. Do you consider it quite impossible that she should ever see me in the ordinary unromantic character of a casual acquaintance?"

"Yes, I do. Vera is a person who deals in extremes. But surely I heard the pony-carriage drive up?" The door opened as she spoke, to admit Mr. Rowcroft; and in the introduction and conversation which ensued the discussion was forgotten.

In the meantime Vera had pursued her hasty way along the lane and across the Park, haunted by the fear that Mr. Stratford might be chasing her; but at last, hearing no footsteps on the road, she felt it safe to walk the rest of the distance. On the terrace in front of the house she came upon her brother Frank, who had been looking out for her.

"Oh, Frank, I've seen him!" she cried.

"Who?" asked Frank, ungrammatically, but with gratifying interest.

"Mrs. Rowcroft's brother, Mr. Stratford—the Kubbet-ul-Haj man, you know. He was to come home to-day."

"And you have actually seen him? You don't say so! Has he got horns and a tail?"

"Frank! He is just a kind, elderly sort of man." It may be as well to mention that Mr. Stratford's age was just under forty. "But his face," added Vera with deep satisfaction, "is exactly what I always thought it would be."

"Oh! And so you sat and glared at him, I suppose, and he wondered whether there was a wasp walking on his bald head, or



whether his tie was sticking up at the back of his neck, all because you didn't tell him that you were watching the halo round his brows, which no one else could see. And if he happened to speak to you, you blushed up to the eyes, and looked as if you wished the ground to open and swallow you up, and he would have liked to call out to Mrs. Rowcroft, 'Please let that child be taken to the nursery; it's going to cry!'"

"Frank, you are *horrid*! I never do that sort of thing—I mean," in some confusion, "he isn't a bit that kind of man."

"A little vague, but still reassuring. Is he a decent sort of chap, then?"

"Of course! How could he be anything else?" asked Vera, indignantly, and went indoors to sit by herself in a corner and dream of her hero all the evening.

Frank knew the symptom by experience, and was not surprised the next morning when a rather flushed and dishevelled Vera, with an inky forefinger, invited his attendance in the deserted schoolroom, which was her especial sanctum. He was accustomed to invitations of this kind; but they came usually on wet days, when he would find Vera hovering restlessly about him, anxious to attract his attention, but too much afraid of the notice of the rest to call upon him directly. In the old schoolroom, when the door was safely locked, she would produce a blotted sheet of paper, and wait anxiously for his verdict.

"What, perpetrated another?" he said jovially, as he followed her in, and sat down in the governess's old armchair while she turned the key. "What is it about now? General Gordon, or a dewdrop, or sunset clouds, or the Great War? Hand it over. Oh, I say, you are gone on that fellow, Vera! 'Good knight and true,' eh? But, you know, this isn't so bad; I really think it's the best thing you've done!"

"Oh, Frank, do you really?"

Frank was only two years older than Vera; but he was a scholar of his college, and spoke at the Union, and helped to edit a University magazine, and might therefore be considered a high literary authority. He alone of the family was voluntarily admitted into the secret of Vera's attempts at poetry, although the rest might guess at them, and he bestowed his criticism fully and freely, apportioning blame mercilessly where he felt it was called for, whether by a fault in metre or by an undue display of sentiment, which Frank called "gush."

"Yes, it might be worse. It really runs—except the third line of the last verse. You must alter that. There's a swing about it, too. Go on and prosper, old girl! I begin to think you've got the real thing in you, after all."

"Oh, Frank! But do you suppose other people would think so? Now you have said that, I must try it somewhere. Don't you think

I might send it to the *St. Margaret's Advertiser*—you know that Scotch paper which Aunt Ellen sends mamma once a week?—and see if they would put it in? They have printed things of mine twice already, you know; and, though it isn't really that I want to see it in print, I should like to know if they think it good. They can't tell who I am in the least, because I never put any name or address, so Aunt Ellen would never know anything about it."

"Well, I think you might as well," said Frank judicially. "It couldn't do any harm, and I am rather curious to see whether it would strike other people as it does me. What a shocking little fraud you are, Vera! Looking as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, and writing red-hot poems on a man you've only seen once in your life."

"Oh, but I feel as if I knew him quite well—when he isn't there!" said Vera eagerly, as she let Frank out of the room.

## CHAPTER II.

IF Vera was hoping to maintain her acquaintance with Mr. Stratford on the somewhat paradoxical footing she had described to Frank, she was doomed to disappointment, for her father met the hero in the village with his brother-in-law the Vicar, took a fancy to him at first sight, and made him free of the house. Mr. Stratford was an essentially companionable man, always ready to adapt himself to the ways of those about him, and the Branscombe family welcomed him into their circle with acclamation. Mrs. Rowcroft declared heroically that she was delighted he should not be restricted to driving her about in the pony-carriage by way of amusement, and the Vicar, who had feared that his parish work would be likely to suffer through the necessity of his entertaining his brother-in-law, was both glad and relieved to know that he was so well taken care of. The only person who objected to the new state of things was Vera, and even in her case anticipation was far worse than reality. She was in terror for some time lest Mr. Stratford should refer to the determination with which she had declined his escort on the occasion of their first meeting, and thus expose her to the jeers of her family, to which Vera's oddities were fair game—in fact, it was regarded rather as a duty to lose no opportunity of teasing her on the subject of her shyness and bad manners. Mr. Stratford, however, earned her undying gratitude by making not the slightest allusion to her precipitate flight from the Vicarage, although she was horribly conscious that there was a smile under his moustache when he remarked, on shaking hands with her, that he had had the honour of meeting Miss Branscombe before. Moreover, he did not, like the majority of her acquaintances, either ignore her or join with her own family in calling attention to her peculiarities, for his manner to her was even markedly

kind. She was painfully embarrassed at first when it became evident that he would not allow her to be left out of account in the general conversation, but he asked her opinion so politely, and showed himself so patient with her blushing and incoherent answers, that her wounded soul was soon cheered by the conviction that Mr. Stratford, at any rate, did not consider her so very different from other people. To the rest of the family it appeared that Mr. Stratford, with mistaken kindness, was sacrificing himself in the attempt to draw her out, and Frank seized a favourable opportunity when they were alone to give him a piece of advice.

"You'll never find it any good to try and get Vera to keep up a conversation, you know," he said. "It's only a waste of valuable time to attempt to make her talk like an ordinary Christian. If you want to make her flare up, start her off upon Gordon, or Bishop Hannington, or Frank Leigh in 'Westward Ho!' or some old buffer of that sort. Just blackguard them a bit, and you'll have her on. George, my sister Etta's husband, always does when he wants to rag her."

Mr. Stratford laughed, but not quite freely, and he did not seem to be in a hurry to take Frank's advice. He persevered in his efforts to make Vera talk, and before long her family became aware that she could answer a question addressed to her suddenly without blushing more than a very little. It was the sapient George himself, whose opinion had great weight with the Branscombes, who first noticed this. After bringing his wife down to Branscombe for the summer, he had returned to town for three weeks or so to look after his business, and then took a short holiday himself. When on the day after his return he announced that "Vera was really quite coming out," a chorus of self-congratulation followed his remark, for the family all felt that their labours in the cause of Vera's education were being crowned with success at last. Like a wise man, George made no attempt to persuade them that they were taking to themselves a credit which did not belong to them, but simply gave utterance to a second remark.

"Vera is a very lucky girl," he said impressively. There was a moment's pause of astonishment, and then Frank broke into a peal of incredulous laughter, for which his mother rebuked him with some asperity. She really did not see what there was to laugh at, she said; they all knew that Vera would settle down some day like other girls, and certainly Mr. Stratford was a most agreeable man, and seemed to draw her out wonderfully. And what a far better thing it would be for him to marry an Englishwoman than that foreign person to whom he had once been engaged! (Mrs. Branscombe was happily unaware that it was the resemblance he had traced in her to his dead love which had first attracted Mr. Stratford to Vera.) It was not likely that this eminently practical and insular view of things would be disputed, and the rest of the family accepted the situation

in the same philosophical spirit as Mrs. Branscombe. They had had so much practice both in observing and in conducting love-affairs, that they knew exactly how much notice to take of the matter. They were far too well-bred to indulge in meaning glances or teasing remarks, but they managed that Mr. Stratford should generally sit next Vera when he came in to lunch, and insisted that she should form one of the party on all the excursions that were arranged for his benefit. Whether Mr. Stratford observed these delicate attentions or not, he took no notice of them, and did not seem to snatch any special advantage from his opportunities, devoting himself exclusively to getting on friendly terms with Vera, to the great admiration of the oracular George, who declared that "that fellow knew what he was about."

After all, it was Mrs. Rowcroft whose patience failed first. She had remarked, not altogether with approval, the deliberation of her brother's character, and it was her opinion that he spent the greater part of his time in preparing the ground and laying the foundations for his successes. This was all very well in diplomacy, where the man who could hold out longest would probably be the one to win, but in love, if anywhere, she thought, delays were dangerous, and in this case also waste of time. Almost any day Mr. Stratford might be appointed to some fresh post, with orders to take up his duties at once, and here was Vera, absolutely unconscious of his intentions, and regarding him precisely as she might have done any elderly friend of her father's. Mrs. Rowcroft was apt, as she had herself said, to be fidgety at times, and the temptation was too great to try and help Egerton a little in his leisurely wooing. She found her opportunity one day when Mr. Stratford had gone to London to spend a week there on business, and Vera had come across to the Vicarage to have tea with her.

"It feels a little desolate without Egerton here, doesn't it, Vera?" she asked, when she had been supplied with her tea, and the question of the needlework in the village school had been exhaustively discussed.

"It does feel rather queer," assented Vera meditatively, "because we are so much accustomed to him now, but I think it's nice to have tea alone together for once, don't you?"

"What an unkind remark!" said Mrs. Rowcroft. "I am sure Egerton would never say such a thing about you, Vera. Why, the other day, when you didn't come in, he complained that the place looked unnatural without you."

"That was a very nice thing to say," remarked Vera, appreciating the compliment to the full. "It's just what you have said to me more than once before, and he must have known exactly how you felt. I do think Mr. Stratford says nice things, don't you?"

"Yes, and he means them too," said Mrs. Rowcroft. "He is not like some men, who are always saying pretty things without the least

sincerity in them. But I don't know why you should talk as if he had been speaking for me, Vera. He was uttering his own opinion."

"Ah, but it was only because he knew you were missing me," said Vera, smiling with such evident unconsciousness of the real drift of the conversation that her friend would have liked to shake her.

"Vera, you are really too much of a baby!" she said impatiently. "My dear child, can't you see that Egerton cares for you?"

"I don't know what you mean," gasped Vera, the old look of fright returning to her eyes.

"It is not an absolutely unparalleled situation," said Mrs. Rowcroft drily. "He loves you, and some day—before long, I should imagine—he will ask you to be his wife."

"Oh, no, no!" implored Vera, cowering as though from a blow.

"But why not, Vera? I can't imagine how it is that you haven't seen it for yourself. Any of your sisters would have known it long ago in your place, but you are such a dreamy, unpractical little girl. But I shall be quite content to give Egerton up to you, dear, because I know how fond you are of him, and that you really do appreciate him properly. I don't believe there is another woman in the world to whom I would have said that. Don't you think you ought to come and give me a kiss for such a handsome acknowledgment? But you are not going, Vera? What is the matter?"

"Oh, I can't, I can't," moaned Vera, groping for her hat.

"Can't what, my dear child?"

"M—marry Mr. Stratford. I never thought of such a thing. He is so old and so good—not in the least that kind of man. It would be perfectly dreadful, Mrs. Rowcroft. Oh, I could never marry him. I am not good enough. Please do believe it."

"I think you must leave Egerton to be the judge of that," said Mrs. Rowcroft pleasantly. "Of course you are surprised, dear, going about the world with your eyes shut, as you do, but when you have thought about it a little, it won't seem so very dreadful. You will soon learn to regard Egerton in the new light, and I promise never to tell him the terribly uncomplimentary things you have been saying about him. Well, dear child, if you must go——" and she drew the girl's burning face down to hers for a kiss. "Think it over, and when Egerton comes back I do not believe your scruples will be likely to stand against him."

With a responsive shudder, but without saying a word, Vera left the room, and walked down the path with slow, dragging steps. At the gate she paused, and wondered whether what had happened could be all a bad dream. Was it really she herself, Vera Branscombe, who stood looking at earth and sky with such changed eyes? She had been living in a fairyland of her own, peopled with heroes and martyrs who were far more real to her than the human beings among whom she lived, and she held intercourse with them without any of

the embarrassment caused by the shyness and awkwardness which beset her in ordinary life. And now her vague dreams had been suddenly swept away, and she was left face to face with uncompromising realities, with a crisis, with a decision which she must make for herself, and which might involve the alteration of the whole current of her existence. And Vera disliked to be obliged to decide things. If she had been consulted, she would have wished everything to go on for her exactly as it always had done, with a round of small and somewhat monotonous duties which left her room to live her own separate life while performing them. Life to her had never been lacking in earnestness, but now this shock had come to remind her that it was also real, and all the beautiful prismatic tints of her dream-world were fading into the light of common day.

Footsteps coming up the lane disturbed her, and she left the gate on which she had been leaning and walked slowly home, to cry her heart out in the old schoolroom. Not even to her mother or to Frank could she tell what had happened, nor express the shuddering terror which filled her at the bare thought of Mr. Stratford's return. The next day she went about looking like a ghost, keeping carefully to the limits of the park, and refusing absolutely to go and see Mrs. Rowcroft. A new fear had taken possession of her—what if Mr. Stratford should come back earlier than he had intended?

"Vera," said her mother the morning after, coming into the schoolroom, and finding the girl curled up on the broad window-seat. "I want to speak to you, dear. Aren't you well, or is anything the matter?"

A fresh rush of tears was the only answer, and Mrs. Branscombe became alarmed. Laying her hand on Vera's shoulder, she gave her a gentle shake.

"Vera, I insist on knowing what is the matter. Don't be silly, dear; let me know what it is. Is it?"—the idea suddenly struck her that the girl might have been disappointed in her hero—"anything about Mr. Stratford?"

"Yes—oh, please don't ask me! How did you know?" sobbed Vera, burying her face in the curtain.

"But I must hear about it. Has he spoken to you, or written?" asked her mother, in much perplexity.

"No, mamma, but—Mrs. Rowcroft says—he is going to ask me—to marry him," came out in a series of gasps.

"But, my dear child, there is nothing in that to make yourself miserable about. Mr. Stratford is a good, kind man."

"Yes, mamma, that's just it," and Vera sat up and pushed back her hair with desperate energy. "He's too good—I couldn't, couldn't marry him; but he is so kind, I couldn't bear to hurt his feelings by telling him so, if he really did want to marry me. Please, please don't let him speak to me. Tell him that he mustn't."

"How could we do such a thing, Vera, when we can have no



possible objection to him? Of course he will think that he has a right to plead his own cause, and you have only to tell him what you feel. You can't think that he would try to force you to marry him?"

"No, I don't think he would intend to," cried Vera vehemently, "but that is just what it would be. If he was in the room now, and looking at me in that way he has, I couldn't say a word. I should simply be obliged to do whatever he told me."

"But he couldn't marry you without your consent, dear."

"But it wouldn't be without my consent if I didn't say no, would it, mamma? and I couldn't. He frightens me, he does really; he is so strong."

"You are a very silly little girl, Vera," said Mrs. Branscombe, much exercised in mind, "and you will make it very awkward for papa and me. But if you are really afraid that you won't have the moral courage to say no, you had certainly better go away for a time. Your father and I have always said that we would leave our girls quite free in these matters, and it has answered perfectly hitherto. I'm sure no one could be happier than either Etta or Kate. And anyone would have imagined it would be the same with you. If you had had a man made for you, he could not have seemed more suitable than Mr. Stratford, and you seemed to like him so much, too."

"I do, mamma; I like him tremendously, but he frightens me."

"Well," with a patient sigh, "how would you like to go to St. Margaret's? I have just heard from Aunt Ellen, and she says, 'I should be so glad if Vera would pay us a visit, and Frank too, if he could bring himself to exchange cricket for golf. St. Margaret's is at its best just now, and most of our celebrities are at home. I know this will be an attraction to Vera.'"

"Oh, mamma!" and Vera drew a deep breath of relief. "How beautifully it comes in! Do you think we could start to-morrow?"

"We must see what Frank says. There will be a great deal to be done if you do. If you would really like to go, dear, find Frank, and ask him to come to me at once here."

"Go to St. Margaret's?" said Frank, when the idea was broached to him. "Well, I don't mind if I do. They say the golf is awfully good, and one might come in for some of the championship matches. But Vera, mother! You can't mean to say that she is willing to go, now of all times?"

"She is quite determined to go, Frank—hails it as an opportunity of escape, I believe. She seems suddenly to have conceived a dread of Mr. Stratford—why, I don't know, unless it has given her a shock to know that he cares for her. I can't make it out, for one would think he was the very man for her. But she is certainly a most peculiar child. Frank! on your honour, have you been teasing her about him?"

"I! Do you think I'm a fool, mother? I've always thought him an awfully good sort of chap, and just the man for Vera, but she's so queer, I should be afraid to get her on about him, lest she should dismiss him at once. Why, I quite yearn for him as a brother-in-law."

"It is very strange," said Mrs. Branscombe. "If you can find out anything that will throw any light on it, Frank, be sure and let me know. I half hope that Vera is only startled, and doesn't know her own mind, and in that case absence might open her eyes. And now will you ride into Homebury, and telegraph to Aunt Ellen, that she may know when to expect you?"

The rest of the day was passed in all the hurry and bustle of getting things ready and packing them up. Vera worked feverishly, but her heart was in her mouth with fear, and a step on the gravel or a ring at the door-bell made her prepare for instant flight to the schoolroom, where she barricaded herself against false alarms no less than three times. She was afraid even to go and say good-bye to Mrs. Rowcroft, and left a tear-stained little note, full of incoherent apology and assurances of affection, but abstaining alike from any reference to the subject of their last conversation and any explanation of her sudden departure, to be delivered when she and Frank were safely on their way. Her nervousness and trepidation were so apparent that the rest of the family suppressed their anger at her foolishness, and did their best to speed her on her journey, so that it would be difficult to say whether those who went or those who stayed felt more relieved the next morning, when the London train had borne the travellers away from Homebury.

"Frank," said Vera, getting closer to her brother when they had left the station fairly behind, "you don't want me to have to marry Mr. Stratford, and go out to Kubbet-ul-Haj or some place of that sort, do you?"

"Just as you like," was the unsympathetic answer. "There's jolly lion-hunting at Kubbet-ul-Haj, by what Stratford says, and I'd come and stay with you, and take your lord and master off your hands occasionally, and see that he didn't beat you when he was at home. You don't consider what alleviations there would be of your lot, Vera, far less the feelings of your family. As for the poor chap himself, I think your treatment of him is perfectly beastly."

"But, Frank, how could I marry him? It would be as bad as marrying—who shall I say?—the Archbishop of Canterbury. I'm not good enough. You don't know how I feel when I think about it."

"Precious glad I don't, if it makes you do such low things. You ought to have stopped and told him the truth."

"I couldn't, Frank. He would have made me marry him."

"What stuff! He isn't at Kubbet-ul-Haj now, and you have got all the rest of us to look after you, if you must be such a

consummate idiot as not to be able to give a plain answer to a civil question."

"Oh, Frank, I did think you would understand. My only chance was to get away before he came back."

"Well, of all the utter and unredeemable fools!" Frank's pause was more eloquent than words, and Vera drew herself up and retired to nurse her wounded dignity in the furthest corner of the carriage. The coolness which ensued lasted for some time, but it was impossible to keep it up during all the vicissitudes of the long journey, and after a time peace was tacitly made and the subject of Mr. Stratford dropped by mutual consent. Once at St. Margaret's there was so much to be done that they had little time to discuss it anew, even had they wished to do so, which they did not, for Frank was disgusted with what he thought Vera's cowardice, and Vera was woefully disappointed by Frank's unexpected desertion of her. Under these circumstances, it was a relief for the brother and sister not to see as much of one another as was usual in Frank's vacations. He was a golf enthusiast, and found kindred spirits in his uncle and cousins, in whose society he divided his time between playing and watching other people play. As for Vera, she explored the quaint old town under the guidance of her aunt, and also spent a good deal of time by herself, looking at the sea, or dreaming away the hours among the ruins of the old cathedral of St. Scipio, which had a great fascination for her. The chief tangible result of these solitary musings was a good deal of poetry, mostly concerning broken idols and lost illusions, which Frank, when it was submitted to him, tore up in disgust, sternly forbidding Vera to write any more of such mawkish stuff, on pain of the instant withdrawal of his criticism and moral support. He had not yet forgiven her for this misuse of her powers when they chanced to meet at a social gathering in the house of a genial clergyman with a pretty taste in celebrities, a literary lion of the very largest species. This gentleman's forte might be said to be omniscience, and yet he roared in polite society with such extreme mildness that Frank, in awful irony, told Vera that she ought seriously to think of cultivating a closer acquaintance with him, and getting him to criticise her poems. But Vera had learnt by this time that it is not always advisable to seek to extend into the region of everyday life one's knowledge of the people one admires, and she preferred to adore the great man from a safe distance.

*(To be concluded.)*

## PRESAGES OF IMMORTALITY.

"To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower ;  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour."

*Blake : 'Auguries of Innocence.'*

THE presage of immortality most generally insisted on is that instinctive apprehension of it in man, to which so many have borne witness ; those deep desires and cravings of the human heart, which, refusing either to be satisfied with the present, or to relinquish the past, looks wistfully onward to a future, in which life may evolve into that state of heavenly fulfilment to which it dimly aspires now.

"It must be so—Plato, thou reason'st well—  
Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,  
This longing after Immortality?  
Or whence this secret dread and inward horror  
Of falling into naught? Why shrinks the soul  
Back on herself, and startles at destruction?  
'Tis the divinity that stirs within us ;  
'Tis heaven itself that points out an hereafter,  
And intimates eternity to man" . . . .

But beside the instinctive sense of immortality thus strikingly insisted on by Addison, through the lips of Cato, the world and life are full of tokens of some unknown, unseen infinity beyond. A touch, a look, may flash the conviction of it on the soul. A gleam of sunset, a strain of music, the note of a distant bell, of a bird's song, the look of a face in death, the beauty of living looks, one of those heavenly thoughts that come to all, such thoughts as those of which Wordsworth says their

" . . . Very sweetness yieldeth proof  
That they were born for immortality"—

One of those brief spells of peace which, to Cowper, seemed as if "given in earnest of eternal rest." A something less than any of these, a nothing, may suffice to hint to us of our immortal destiny. "Why," asks Maeterlinck, "has an ineffable face beckoned to us from behind an old man's tears, why does a vast night, starred with angels, extend over the smile of a child?" And again—"At a time when my friends are about me it may happen that, in the midst of talk and shouts of laughter, there shall suddenly steal over the face of one of them something that is not of this world. A motiveless silence shall instantly prevail, and for a second's space all shall be unconsciously looking forth with the eyes of the soul."

For it is from the human face divine that immortality most frequently shines.

"No mortal object did these eyes behold  
When first they met the placid light of thine,  
And my soul felt her destiny divine,"

was Michael Angelo's thought at sight of the woman he loved. It was Milton's, at remembrance of that fair infant's face, whose death he celebrated in stately verse :

"Yet can I not persuade me thou art dead . . .  
Oh, no ! for something in thy face did shine  
Above mortality, that show'd thou wast divine."

Charles Wolfe, in his lines "To Mary," touches on the same inability of the mind to connect death with one's beloved, when in their presence :

"If I had thought thou couldst have died  
I might not weep for thee ;  
But I forgot, when by thy side,  
That thou couldst mortal be."

In George Meredith's poem, "Martin's Puzzle," the old cobbler, brooding over the pitiful fate of his little crippled friend, Molly, and tempted thereby into a questioning of God's justice, brings himself up sharply with the reflection :

" . . . And yet, in her eyes,  
She holds a fixed something by which I am checked.

Yonder riband of sunshine aslope on the wall,  
If you eye it a minute 'I'll have the same look ;  
So kind, and so merciful ! God of us all !  
It's the very same lesson we get from the Book."

The effect of all beauty, whether of face, or flower, or landscape, is to stir in us a sense of loss, of longing. Though it brings sadness with the thought that it must die, yet it seems to contain some heavenly promise, some prophecy of Paradise.

"Is each day's beauty but a transient bliss,  
One moment felt, then like a sweet note gone ?  
Rather 'tis like a wave which, swelling, pours  
O'er all the heart a flood of happiness,  
And, ebbing, leaves along our being's shores  
Strange tokens from immensities unknown."

Shelley, whose soul was so seldom visited by peace, recalls a day of beauty and calm amid the pine-woods by the sea, when earth and sky were interfused to his fancy "with an Elysian glow," and, while he drew the very breath of peace from the charmed scene around him, some ray of Heaven's own bliss touched his troubled spirit :

"The whispering waves were half asleep,  
 The clouds were gone to play,  
 And on the bosom of the deep  
 The smile of heaven lay.  
 It seem'd as if the hour were one  
 Sent from beyond the skies,  
 Which scatter'd from above the sun  
 A light of Paradise!"

The erudite old Scottish poet, George Buchanan, as translated from the Latin by Gilfillan, finds, in the pure ethereal air of May-day, a sweet forewarning of coming bliss:

"Hail, glory of the fleeting year!  
 Hail, day the fairest, happiest here!  
 Memorial of the time gone by,  
 And emblem of futurity!"

To the New England genius of Hawthorne, as to the Red Indian, his predecessor, the golden days of autumn were prophetic of Paradise. In those genial days, he says, when nature "has perfected her harvests and accomplished every needful thing that was given her to do—then she overflows with a blessed superfluity of love. She has leisure to caress her children now. It is good to be alive, and at such times. Thank heaven for breath! yes, for mere breath, when it is made up of a heavenly breeze like this. It comes with a real kiss upon our cheeks. It would linger fondly around us, if it might, but since it must begone, it embraces us with its whole kindly heart and passes onward to embrace likewise the next thing that it meets. A blessing is flung abroad and scattered far and wide over the earth, to be gathered up by all who choose. I recline upon the still unwithered grass, and whisper to myself: 'O perfect day! O beautiful world! O beneficent God!' And it is the promise of a blessed eternity, for our Creator would never have made such lovely days and have given us the deep hearts to enjoy them above and beyond all thought unless we were meant to be immortal. This sunshine is the golden pledge thereof. It beams through the gates of paradise, and shows us glimpses far inward."

"I dimly guess from blessings known  
 Of greater out of sight,"

sings Whittier. Leigh Hunt, following the same clue, writes in his Autobiography in his seventy-fifth year, but a few months before his death, with the brave hopefulness that characterised him through life, "Why . . . so much half-beauty here and such need for completing it, if complete it is not to be? I do not think that enough has been made of that argument from analogy, divine as was the mind of Plato that suggested it. . . . As to the fulfilment of these yearnings on earth to be made entire in a future state, I can no more believe in the existence of regions in space where God has made half-orbs in



their heavens, or half-oranges on their trees, than I can believe He will fail to make these conscious half-satisfied natures of ours which thus crave for completeness, as entire and rounded in that which they crave for, as any other fruits of his hands."

Writing (in 'The Seaboard Parish') of a dream of resurrection, strength and beauty which had come to the comfort of a sick girl: "The very ability of the mind," writes George Macdonald, "whether of itself, or by some inspiration of the Almighty, to dream such things is a proof of our capacity for such things—a proof, I think, that for such things we were made." Or, as Plato himself has put it, "The soul cannot imagine what does not exist, because it is the shadow of God, who knows and creates all things."

Many, with Sir Philip Sidney, have found in love a presage of immortality:

"If the spheres senseless do yet hold a music,  
If the swan's sweet voice be not heard but at death,  
If the mute timber, when it hath the life lost,  
Yieldeth a lute's tune;  
Are then human minds privileg'd so meanly,  
As that hateful Death can abridge them of power,  
With the vow of truth to record to all worlds  
That we be her spoils?

\* \* \* \* \*

Fleshly veil consumes, but a soul hath his life,  
Which is held in love: love it is that hath  
Join'd Life to this our soul."

So also the anonymous author of that dainty old-time lyric, "Love me Little, Love me Long"—

"Say thou lov'st me while thou live,  
I to thee my love will give,  
Never dreaming to deceive  
While that life endures:  
Nay, and after death, in sooth,  
I to thee will keep my truth,  
As now, when in my May of youth;  
This my love assures."

Between the restrained, half-playful ardour of these lines, whose singer is content that the love of his beloved should be little if it be but long, even to eternity, and the impassioned sonnet in which Mrs. Browning told her love, and the ways thereof, how striking is the contrast! Except that she likewise reaches, through her love,

"To the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal grace;"

while she not only claims for that love that it absorbs her entire present being, but looks forward to its becoming even stronger after death.

Coleridge's "Happy Husband" recognises in the very title of "wife" the promise of something beyond this fleeting present—

"Oft, oft methinks, the while with thee  
I breathe, as from my heart, thy dear  
And dedicated name, I hear  
A promise and a mystery,  
A pledge of more than passing life,  
Yea, in that very name of Wife!"

A promise which some have found in other of the "starry names" of home, in the names of father, of mother, those types and shadows of the deity on earth.

Browning, in his masterful fashion, in lines supposed to be addressed by "Any Wife to any Husband," discovers in a husband's love not only an omen, but a saving power of immortality—at least in the wife's fancy—

"Thy love shall hold me fast  
Until the little minute's sleep is past  
And I wake saved.

But woman, by her very being, has been regarded significant, as of some divine hereafter. Charles Follen, whose essay "On the Future State of Man" inspired his friend Whittier with one of his most striking poems, refers to this attitude toward woman among the Teutons of old. "In the lays of the love-singers," he writes, "you still perceive what Tacitus said of the ancient Germans, that they recognised in the soul of woman something divine and prophetic." Maeterlinck says very much the same, and that in a woman's presence glimpses from an unseen life are most likely to flash across the soul.

"Seraph of heaven, too gentle to be human,  
Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman  
All that is insupportable in thee  
Of light and love and immortality!"

So Shelley sang to the beautiful Emilia Viviani, one of the "two beams of one eternity," of which his poor Mary was the other—

"See where she stands! a mortal shape indued  
With love and life and light and deity,  
And motion which may change but cannot die;  
An image of some bright eternity."

Richard Green, the historian, as reported by a hearer of one of his sermons, saw in a mother's joy over the birth of her child a prophecy of the child's eternal well-being. The preacher, who is described as "a bright little gentleman, building up beautiful images of hope," worked up from the text, "For joy that a man is born into the world," to his conclusion: "Ushered into the world with such pæans of joy, like a conqueror already, surely this child that is born must be destined for joy; surely in the mother's joy is a presage of immortality; surely the race so bravely started shall reach the goal of gladness."

Wordsworth says the same in a peculiarly touching poem to a mother on the birth of her first child. Though he makes the prophecy to consist rather in the mother's pangs, to which such a blessed reward is vouchsafed, than in her joy over the new-born delight—

"But, O mother, by the close  
Duly granted to thy throes ;  
By the silent thanks, now tending  
Incense-like to Heaven, descending  
Now to mingle and to move  
With the gush of earthly love,  
As a debt to that frail creature,  
Instrument of struggling nature  
For the blissful calm, the peace  
Known but to this *one* release—  
Can the pitying spirit doubt  
That for human kind springs out  
From the penalty a sense  
Of more than mortal recompense ?"

But baby himself is one of the chief links between this world and the other. The "bright shoots of everlastingness" pierce through his little fleshly robe to us, with their subtle fragrance waking our dulled perceptions to a sense of something beyond our mere material existence of which, but for these heavenly reminders, we might lose the trace. Aldrich's "Baby Bell" seemed to her adorers,

"As if she yet stood in the light  
Of those ope'd gates of Paradise.  
\* \* \* \* \*  
We felt we had a link between  
This real world and that unseen—  
The land beyond the morn."

Dr. Westland Marston gathers up some of these signs and tokens of futurity in which nature, both the nature without and the nature within us abounds, and weaves them into his sonnet, "Immortality—an Inference."

"If I had lived ere seer or prince unveiled  
A life to come, methinks that, knowing thee,  
I should have guessed thine immortality ;  
For nature, giving instincts, never failed  
To give the ends they point to, never quailed  
The swallow, through air-wilds, o'er tracts of sea,  
To chase the summer ; seeds that poisoned be  
Dream of and find the daylight unassailed  
By doubt, impelled by yearnings for the main,  
The creature river-born doth there emerge.  
So thou, with thoughts and longings which our earth  
Can never compass in its narrow verge,  
Shalt the fit region of thy spirit gain,  
And death fulfil the promptings of thy birth."

P. W. ROOSE.

## ACROSS THE MOOR.

BY M. PAYNE SMITH.

THE express drew up with a jerk, though the next stoppage was not due for the best part of an hour. It was a tiny wayside station, with only one porter in sight, for the station-master had hurried to the guard's van, and was discussing something with him, in low eager tones. Then the guard came along the platform and spoke to one or two of the passengers, the word "accident" became audible, and a girl screamed. But the guard was cool and decided. "There has been a collision down the line," he explained, "and there is a block, but they hope to have it clear by the morning."

People began to leave their seats, and look about them; there was a railway inn of the humblest possible order, and all around stretched a great moor.

"How far is it to Mossend Springs?" said a voice in the station-master's ear, and he turned to see a tall figure with a slight stoop and a worn, much-lined face.

"A matter of twenty miles," he answered. "'Tis but seven across the moor, but the way is none too safe for a stranger."

"I must get a horse, or trap, or something," said the passenger hastily. "I must be there to-night."

"'Tis a bad night to travel," said the station-master shortly.

"Perhaps," the stranger glanced round, and saw moor and valley bathed in soft sunset light. "My wife is dangerously ill at Mossend." His voice shook a little, but the hint had been enough, and the station-master was ready to help.

"Here, Jack!" he cried, addressing a lad who had appeared from nowhere in particular, "the gentleman must get on. Take him to Thorpes and see if they will find him a trap."

"Thorpes" was a farm only a few hundred yards from the station, but hidden by a clump of trees. There was no one about, and yard and house-close seemed deserted.

The lad went straight up to the back door, and entered without knocking; inside were half-a-dozen men, a girl or two, and an old woman who sat by the fire knitting.

"The gentleman wants a trap," said Jack gruffly, addressing a middle-aged man, a shade better dressed than the others.

"Can't have it," was the answer. "Dick's in the town, and he won't come back till morning."

Jasper Ford took matters into his own hands.

"I must reach Mossend Springs to-night," he said in his calm determined voice. "The line is blocked so I must ride or drive across the moor. Have you a horse I can hire? and will you find me a guide?"

"I've a horse," said the farmer shortly; "but there'll be no guide the night. Better wait till morning."

"I cannot, my wife is dying, and expects me. What is the danger on the moor?"

A shiver went round the room, and the farmer looked his visitor over scrutinizingly.

"Maybe there'd be no harm," he said thoughtfully; "eh, mother?"

"Let him go," muttered the old woman. "If he waits, his heart will break. But beware!" she went on, raising her voice and looking at Jasper. "Speak to no man; touch no man; and keep the love in thy heart warm, for 'tis only love that will serve thee among them all."

In a few minutes a horse was saddled, and the farmer came outside to put the stranger on his road.

"You'd best go across the moor," he said shortly. "Keep the road to the second milestone then take a cart track to the left. Keep towards the black rocks, and go carefully, for the moss is not over-safe. 'Tis but seven mile, when you are once on the moor. And keep a good heart, for you'll need it."

"What is wrong?" asked Jasper suddenly. "Why is this place like a desert? And why are you all indoors on such a lovely evening?"

The farmer turned abruptly on his heel, and went into the house without a word, but the old groom who held the horse's head, bent forward, and spoke in a whisper.

"'Tis the night of the dead," he said mysteriously. "The old people be out on St John's Eve, and 'tis no canny to meet them."

"The old people?" Jasper made a guess. "Do you mean ghosts?" he asked incredulously.

"Na—na! Them's no christened men, but the old folk, that was here first. Maybe they'll lead thee astray."

"Well, I can't help it! Thanks!"—and Jasper gave the reins a shake, and started on his ride.

Ghosts! Spirits! What ideas, he thought, as he made his way along the rough road. A crowd of men kept indoors by fear of the "old people." What could the groom have meant? Were the ancient dwellers in the land remembered still in this moorland place where their stone cromlechs were unaltered? It was an interesting bit of superstition, but very inconvenient, coupled with all the other hindrances. What a chapter of accidents it had been! First the delay of the letter! Then the bother at the level-crossing, which had meant missing the early train. Then the fair at Oakford had made the second train late at the junction, with a consequent hour's delay.

Then the accident had stopped the express; and now Midsummer Eve kept all men indoors for fear of the spirits of the old moormen.

But in spite of all difficulty here he was. Nell should see how her husband could override obstacles. That was the second milestone? Yes, and there was the cart road. Another seven miles and he should be with Nell.

Jasper Ford stopped short in his meditations as he trotted his horse along the grassy road. Yes, there had been one obstacle after another. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." Where was that? Oh, yes, Deborah's song, of course. And the stars, or rather the trains, had fought against Jasper Ford all that June day, while his wife was gasping her life away at Mossend. It was just like Nell—just the inconsiderate sort of thing the wife always did—only a little want of care, and the slight illness had taken a serious turn. Nell was always like that, always getting colds, and saying nothing about them till they had time to settle on her chest. How often he had scolded her, and all for no good. How often he had scolded her! Yes, for twenty years he had scolded her incessantly, and though she trembled and looked scared, she had never altered, but had gone on in her old careless ways in spite of him.

Perhaps tender timid women were not the better for scolding! This was a new idea, and Jasper took it in very slowly. Twenty years! It was a long time to spend in nagging a delicate wife, whose very nervousness and terror had made her more and more a target for her husband's sarcasms! How often she used to wince at his remarks—how often the tears used to roll down and make her nose red! After all, what was it all about? Jasper had to consider, for somehow his failings towards his wife during those twenty miserable years were more evident to him at this moment than her failings towards him.

Why had he scolded her so much? At first it was because she was unwise and careless about her health, and he was anxious about her. Then she lost her baby, and he had scolded her for that. Poor disappointed childwife, so weak and white, so longing for the love and tenderness which he had refused her. That had been the beginning; the other two children had lived, but she was always spoiling them and breaking the rules he had laid down for their bringing up, and he had had a good deal to say to her about her faults as a mother. And yet her nursing had saved Archie's life, and both he and Dora adored and obeyed their gentle mother, while his strict rule only brought out the strong vein of obstinacy that both boy and girl had inherited from——

Here the horse stumbled and he started, but his thoughts went back to the children that obstinacy came from him! He was firm to a fault and never gave in; never put other people's comfort and happiness before his whims, never made allowance, never excused.

What in the world was happening? In the dim twilight of the



moor Jasper Ford saw himself as he was, a bully, an overbearing, evil-tempered master ruling by fear, not love. What had the old woman said? "Keep the love in thy heart warm, for 'tis only love will serve thee," and the love in his heart was cold—ice cold.

The horse stopped suddenly, trembling all over. Jasper's reverie was over, and he woke to his surroundings to find himself off the track and alone on the silent moor.

Alone, was he? He rubbed his eyes and stared around him, trying to see his way in the twilight. There was nothing near him, and yet the moor was lonely no longer; for all around were twinkling lights and dim shadowy figures. In front stretched an open space, evidently a bog; to his right the moor rose dark and sombre, and close by was a pile of rocks which at any rate promised safe going. He dismounted and led the horse towards them in spite of its evident terror, while he looked in all directions for the lost track. But there was no sign of the road, and he was up to his knees in heather at one moment, and scrambling over loose stone the next, while the strange lights flickered and flamed around him.

Now he was among the rocks, and one large, flat-topped one caught his eye. There was a glow upon it, and he went close to it, and saw circles and lines upon it gleaming with a phosphorescent light. Then a long-forgotten day of his boyhood came before him, when he had wandered on another moor with an old friend, who had told him that antiquaries believed these carved stones to be connected with sun worship.

"But it is no such thing," he went on. "It may be one pattern, it may be another; but, if you follow the main line of the pattern, you will come to another carved stone about a mile further on, for these are the old people's milestones, and where they point there is always safe going for a horse."

In those days Jasper had been more eager to hear about the old people than the road, but now the stone pointed the way, and the flickering fires would lead him to Mossend. And all along the road were the watchfires of the dead, from whom the moor-men were hiding! Dead men, in whose company there might be danger of death or madness, and at the other end of the road was the dying wife!

"God help me!" said Jasper as he mounted the horse and turned its head towards the fires. "If I suffer, I deserve it; but I will not turn back till I have Nell's forgiveness." And he started along the road of the old people.

He was among them now, with fires on each side and dark swarthy figures round the fires! Figures in strange garments who flung their arms over their heads to scare his horse, and seemed by their movements to resent his intrusion. But at the next stone they fell back, and he found himself among a crowd of wayfarers, who danced round him, brandished clubs in his face, and tried to stop

him ; but still he pushed on, dazed, wearied, but determined, and at the next stone the horse stopped short.

All around were the old dwellers on the moor, living their lives again ; but in front of him was a clear space, round which the weird figures crowded, holding each other tightly and gazing into each other's faces, with wild eyes full of love.

Suddenly a terror seized upon Jasper, and he grew cold to the heart, till Nell's sad face rose up before him and gave him strength, and then and there he vowed to make amends.

And now a mournful procession drew near and crossed the open space. Stern warriors, grim priests of some long-dead faith, came first, followed by pale maidens, who wept and scattered flowers before a bier, carried by swarthy slaves, on which lay a sorely-wounded man, beautiful in his suffering. Beside him walked a calm stately woman, nobler, handsomer than any of the others, and though there was anguish on his face and deep grief on hers, their eyes met with such a depth of love that none could call them unhappy.

As they passed Jasper, the bearers paused for a moment, and man and woman looked him steadily in the face, and suddenly a whole history of love and sorrow, treachery, heartbreak and strong faith, was laid bare before him ; but the love and trust triumphed over death and wrong. The old people were even as the people of to-day, and no sorrow could break or injure love and truth.

It was only a moment, and then the bearers moved onwards, and Jasper Ford bent his head and vowed to give true love to the wife whose life he had made wretched. Then the horse moved forward, and the "old people" made no more efforts to hinder him—nay, rather did they help him forward as he passed them, for many a half-clad woman waved her hand to him and many a swarthy warrior greeted him in strange guttural tones as he rode by. They were not dancing now or fighting, for the love that had brought them back from the grave was all they thought of now, and lovers, husbands, wives and parents were busy renewing the love of the old days.

They were all ages and they needed little but each other, and as Jasper passed couples clasped in each other's arms, or saw a mother holding her babe, or a father watching some sturdy boy, he read the same story on each face, till he felt an utter disgust with himself and his past life. The moor-men were warm-hearted, faithful wooers, and he? He, the modern product of civilisation was the brute ; and he knew it and sorrowed for it as he hastened along the track. Then other lights began to twinkle, Mossend was reached, and he rode hastily to his wife's lodging.

Dora met him, her eyes no longer cold and stern as they generally were to her father, but sad and full of tears.

"She is sinking fast," said the girl ; "and she has been asking for you all day ! Oh, father !"

Jasper put his arm round her and gave her a loving embrace very different from the cold kiss his daughter was accustomed to.

"Oh, Dora," he murmured, "if I could only undo these years!" And they went up together.

Nell was conscious, and her face lighted up as her husband entered and knelt beside the bed.

"I knew you would come," she whispered. "Dear husband, you must forgive my faults!"

"Oh, Nell, Nell," sobbed Jasper, "it is I who need forgiveness! Forgive me, my darling, and let me try to make amends!"

But it was too late. Nell smiled once more, for she had gone back to the days of long ago, and there was only another whisper of, "Husband, dearest husband!" and all was over. Pale, faded, weary Mrs. Ford had gone, and in her place lay a figure with that marvellous look of youth which sometimes comes after death. Nell, Jasper Ford's early love, pale, fair, and fragile as a flower.

And so the ride across the moor was over, but it had not been in vain. And in after years, when he still struggled with his temper, Jasper would think that perhaps it was better so. Nell had seen the love-light in his eyes, and had not had time to awake to the memory of the bad old days. And while he tried to make his children happy, he always believed that some day his strong love would bring her back, that they might have an hour together under the soft northern twilight.



## HIS OTHER SELF.

WHEN I, Alexander Ogilvie, M.D., am dead, and people turn out the contents of my desk, I wonder what they will think of this treasure? It is a scrap of paper apparently torn out of an old copy-book, and scrawled over in a childish hand with the names of Laurie Pryce and Tom Robertson.

That bit of paper has brought back to me the days when it was scrawled. I have not thought of those days for years and years!

I had not begun my medical student life then, though I had it in prospect. A great deal came between my school-days and my student days, and so it was necessary for me to rub up my Latin and mechanics to make sure of passing my "preliminary." Therefore I went to stay in the family of a retired Somerset House clerk, who lived in a house up a little clean paved court, which opened from St. Martin's Lane, and ended with a green gate, admitting a congregation of Friends to their Meeting House.

My host, Mr. Pryce, was a widower with one child, a boy named Laurie. Laurie had been the maiden name of the deceased Mrs. Pryce. The house was kept by Mrs. Pryce's sister, Miss Emmot Laurie. She was assisted by one old servant who was never called anything but "Jane."

Some of the windows overlooked the yard of the Friends' Meeting House, and others opened upon a blank wall. Everything was very clean and quiet, but frightfully dull. The furniture was half worn out, though it was very carefully kept. One could cut one's fingers on the sharp edges of the silver spoons. The china was all delicate and the linen fine. I was terrified to move for fear I tore or broke something. I believe Miss Emmot was frightened for my sake. She stood in awe of her brother-in-law, and was always in distress lest little Laurie should not come up to his expectations as to goodness or cleverness.

"The Pryces have all been so clever," she used to say, deprecatingly. I never heard Mr. Pryce make any remark about the Lauries. When Miss Pryce casually mentioned them, he always preserved a silence which did not seem complimentary.

I remember that the first night I stayed there I thought to myself, "This is the sort of house where people see ghosts!" It was my bedstead put that into my head—a starved-looking four-poster, with faded moreen curtains. I found afterwards that Miss Emmot firmly believed she had seen a ghost—the ghost of a living woman—of Mrs. Pryce before she died.

She told me the story one rainy afternoon, when we were alone in the little sitting-room where Mrs. Pryce's harp stood, and where hung a ghastly presentment of her, done in a style never seen now. Indeed, I never saw one such in any other house, though there must have been many, since the "artist" who executed them lived in a fashionable West-End studio and had a show-case at his door. It was a profile portrait modelled in wax, with a coloured glass eye, the "real hair" of the deceased arranged on head and brow, and a piece of a dress she had actually worn draped about the shoulders. I am certain that Miss Emmot secretly loathed the thing, but felt herself to be very wicked for so doing, since it had been executed under Mr. Pryce's express directions, and was to be regarded as a testimony of his connubial love and reverence.

Miss Laurie told her ghost story in whispers—she spoke much in whispers out of respect for Mr. Pryce's studies. She said she had left her sister in her bedroom on the second floor, lying on her sofa, from which, indeed, she was not able to rise. Miss Emmot had gone downstairs to attend to some household duty, and on her way upstairs again she had seen her sister standing at the window on the first-floor landing, looking out. That for a moment Miss Emmot was glad, thinking Mrs. Pryce must feel better, but that, when the figure turned, taking no notice of her, and walked slowly into the study, she felt "there was something queer." Following into the study, she found nobody there but Mr. Pryce busy at his desk, and going next to Mrs. Pryce's apartment, she saw her as she had left her—helpless on the sofa.

"Then I knew my sister would die," Miss Emmot added impressively, looking at me with her earnest eyes. But for a strange light in those eyes, Miss Emmot was a dim person, slight and nimble, with hair and complexion sandy in hue, the complexion pale like the dry hollows under the links by the sea, the hair darker like the wet lip of the sand. And indeed her very eyes were like wave-washed pebbles, for I don't know what their colour was; they may have been grey or green, or brown or yellow, or a little of each.

"Did you tell Mr. Pryce?" I asked.

"Oh—oh, no!" she answered, as if the idea was astonishing to her. "I should not have liked to disturb him."

I thought she meant that she had shrunk from distressing him with what she had felt to be ominous.

"You told him afterwards?" I suggested.

She shook her head.

"I would not think of mentioning such things to him," she said.

"He would call them nonsense."

But she had told Jane, and Jane had told Laurie. I saw the boy look curiously at the two women, as the one sat at the head of the table and the other "waited," on a certain occasion when Mr. Pryce pompously descanted on the "falseness" and "wickedness" of any

of those mysteries which we do not understand, and which he called "all superstition." He would not listen to any of my suggestions; he would not allow that some of those who say they have seen ghosts may at least honestly believe they have seen something, be it what it may; he would not take into consideration any conditions of nervous exaltation or depression; in short, he would not admit that there could be anything in heaven or earth not dreamed of in his very narrow philosophy.

"All lies, sir—interested lies; told for some object! I have never seen anything mysterious; I have never had any wonderful dreams, or premonitions, or anything of the sort. Neither has any respectable and sensible person known to me; such a person, say, as one would venture to employ in a position of trust in one's own household. No, sir. And now, Master Laurie"—for thus he generally addressed his son—"what is going on at school to-day?"

This was his regular question, but he never seemed to care much for the reply. Yet I am certain Mr. Pryce regarded himself as a model father, though his paternal functions were limited to scanning Laurie's school reports and to fault-finding. It may be said that, at any rate, he also paid the bills. But I heard, by-and-by, that he had "retired" on the strength of his wife's little fortune, and that Miss Emmot also had an income which went into the housekeeping. Indeed, he founded his pretensions on this very basis.

"Learned men," he said, "do not make money."

Miss Emmot dutifully accepted the statement without being enough of a logician to retort that all men who do not make money are not, therefore, learned.

Besides, Mr. Pryce had written two books, which, in his sister-in-law's eyes, set him on a pedestal above ordinary mortals. One was a treatise on grammar, and the other was a volume of political essays. When he saw Miss Emmot enjoying one of Walter Scott's novels, he was wont to say, with a gentle but studied reproachfulness:

"I never see you dipping into my solid works."

He kept these works in double sets, one set bound in russia—which had been his marriage present to his wife—the other bound in cloth for lending. There were two or three dilapidated toadies, Mr. Pryce's only visitors, who used to borrow these books, coming up and asking for them. It was their system of earning a little loan, or the gift of an old hat or coat. The baser sort find a very profitable pursuit in fostering vanity. The greater the blockhead the more will he pay for hearing that he is an unappreciated genius.

Whenever Miss Emmot asked her nephew what place he had in class, he generally replied, though with sundry small variations:

"About where I was yesterday; but Tom Robertson is at the top of the class."

"Tom Robertson seems always there," observed Miss Emmot, while Mr. Pryce once actually condescended to remark:



"If Laurie had any spirit that would fire his emulation."

Laurie ventured to say: "Tom Robertson works so well because he is allowed a fire and a candle in his bedroom, and his mother goes up and sits with him and explains his lessons."

But Mr. Pryce was conveniently absorbed in his newspaper.

Laurie talked a great deal about Tom Robertson. When his aunt said she must think of buying him some new clothes, Laurie told us that Tom had got a velvet jacket for best, which he wore when he went out with his father. Whereupon Mr. Pryce jeered, and asked if the father also took a barrel-organ, and then Tom would do for the attendant monkey!

On holidays, Laurie was very fond of taking a book and resorting to the "leads" at the top of the house, whence he could see little but the spire of St. Martin's Church and the roof of the old workhouse in Hemming's Row. "Jane's" bedroom opened upon this retreat, which she used sometimes for drying clothes. Laurie told us that Tom Robertson spent his holidays in the country with an uncle who had been abroad. Tom had a pony to ride, and Tom went out in a boat. Tom had climbed a mountain and had sat down on the top, whence he could see the sea and ten counties. Tom had once gone off with the gipsies, and had stayed in their tents for two or three days. Tom said that when it was too late for people to want their fortunes told, the gipsies dropped the tent curtains and spread velvet carpets on the ground, and ate their stolen fowls and poached hares, with their fingers, off silver plate. He said there was a queen among the gipsies, and she put real diamonds in her black hair. Tom had been very sorry to leave the gipsies; he meant to go back some day.

"How he must have frightened his poor mother!" sighed Miss Emmot.

"I believe Tom is a depraved little liar!" said Mr. Pryce. "I have an instinctive dislike to that boy; and my instincts always prove correct!"

"Have you seen much of him, sir?" I asked.

"Him—no. Caught sight of him once or twice with Laurie in the street. But to a keen eye, sir—a keen eye—a first impression is everything." Then he added hastily, careful to keep up his character of a watchful father: "Of course the youth belongs to respectable people, sir—highly respectable family; otherwise I should not allow Laurie to associate with him. I don't think one can be too particular."

Laurie looked at his father with wide eyes and lips a little apart.

I could not make out Laurie Pryce's expression. He had some very definite thought in his small mind, I was sure of that.

"Tom Robertson isn't a liar!" he said solemnly.

Mr. Pryce laughed.

"People who are so ready to be sure others are not liars, run risk of making liars of themselves," said he.

One morning, Laurie said to me in a matter-of-fact way :

"This is my birthday, Mr. Ogilvie."

"Dear me!" I cried. "Why didn't somebody tell me yesterday? Where are all your presents? It's a shame to shut me out of the jollification!"

"I don't have presents, thank you," said Laurie. "Aunt Emmot gave me a top once. But father doesn't believe in presents. He said it would be time enough for birthday presents when I get old enough to give them to him."

He went on presently: "Tom Robertson keeps his birthdays. His mother goes into his room in the morning before he's out of bed, and says all sorts of nice things, and when he goes downstairs there are parcels all round his plate, and letters. And they have a goose for dinner, and cake and crackers at tea. They all go to the Circus at night."

"Have you ever been to the Circus?" I asked.

Laurie shook his head. "No," he answered; "but I know what it's like by the pictures on the posters. Tom says he'd like to go to the Circus every night."

"He'd soon get tired of that," I remarked.

"Yes, he'd soon get tired of that," Laurie echoed patiently. He was a child with a pale face and cold hands.

"Is Tom older than you?" I inquired.

"He's just about the same age," he answered. Then he looked up at me and added: "He's a little older: he's just ahead of me."

I supposed this meant that Tom's birthday had preceded Laurie's by two or three months.

"Has he many brothers and sisters?" I asked, carelessly, "making talk," for Laurie seemed to me a dull little soul, and I was sorry for him, though I didn't care a bit about him in the way of liking.

Laurie started. "No," he said, "there's only Tom himself. At least, there's a little sister—a little wee tiny thing. Tom's very fond of her. He says she's to live with him when she's grown up, and she's to keep his house. Tom says his mamma is the most beautiful lady there ever was, and his sister is to be exactly like her."

"I hope he won't be disappointed," I said. "But our sisters, somehow, never do come up to our mothers! Does this Robertson family attend St. Martin's Church?"

(For we went there. A dreary place it was in those days, with high old "sleeping pews," and a kind of three-decker pulpit, for the vicar and curate and the clerk, the whole surmounted by a sounding-board like a table-topped cedar. That sounding-board used to flaunt its neglected dustiness under the very eyes of the dukes and duchesses who then sat in the front pews in the gallery, to say nothing of "the Lords of the Admiralty," who, according to Miss Emmot, monopolised two curious erections at each side of the chancel, something

like very substantial opera-boxes, with sashed windows by which the occupants could, if they chose, shut themselves away from all the sounds going on in the sacred edifice.)

Laurie shook his head again. "No; Tom goes to Westminster Abbey," he said. "I've been there once—one Sunday afternoon. But Tom goes there regular. I don't think Tom would go anywhere else. He says the music is like the cherubim and seraphim—specially what the chorister-boys sing by themselves."

"Why, Tom must be quite a connoisseur!" I laughed.

"What's that?" asked Laurie, quickly. "Is it anything bad?"

"Oh dear no," I answered—"it only means he is a first-rate judge."

"Tom wants to be a judge," confided Laurie. "He thinks it would be grand to pardon poor helpless people and get them their rights, and to sit on the woolsack. And he admires the look of the lawyers' wigs. But he says sometimes he'd like to be cast away on a desert island. And I know he wishes he'd been Robin Hood."

"Tom must be a nonsensical lad," said Mr. Pryce, who had come into the room while we were talking. "If he was my little boy, he'd have to understand he must go into a counting-house or a shop."

"Isn't it possible to be Robinson Crusoe or Robin Hood even in an office or a shop?" I suggested. But I knew Mr. Pryce would not understand me. What he did not understand he invariably regarded as foolish, and never condescended to notice it unless, of course, it occurred in Miss Emmot or Laurie—when he rebuked it.

Once, Laurie told us how, when he had been playing on the Adelphi Terrace, a big boy had snatched a doll from a little girl and had thrown it across the palings into the soft mud which the receding tide left in front of the wharves below. (There was no Embankment in those days.) He said the little girl, "who was all dressed in black," had cried terribly. Gentle Aunt Emmot was quite touched by the pity of it, and asked Laurie what he had done in the way of comfort.

"I didn't do anything," he said; "I just stood and watched. A lame old man told her 'not to cry,' but that made no difference."

"Could not you have run round by the stairway at the end of the Terrace, and got the doll?" asked Aunt Emmot. "The little girl might have managed to get the mud cleaned off, and even your doing it would have been something. There's nothing takes out the taste of injustice so well as kindness, even if it isn't of much use."

This was quite a long speech for her.

"Tom Robertson went round by the stairway," Laurie related, "and he got the doll. It was not so very dirty because it was only made of rag, and was light and didn't sink."

"Wasn't the little girl very grateful?" asked the aunt.

"Well, she was vexed that one of the doll's shoes was gone," Laurie replied.

"Anyhow, Tom Robertson showed himself a thoughtful, brave

little gentleman, that's all I can say," was Aunt Emmot's comment. "I should like you to have been able to tell the story of yourself, Laurie."

"But Tom got into an awful mess," said Laurie, with a queer little laugh. "The mud went quite through his shoes and stockings, and I don't believe his trousers will ever come right again!"

"Ah, well!" sighed Aunt Emmot, "and your trousers are new. I don't know what your father would have said. And you always catch cold when you get wet feet."

I did not like it in Laurie Pryce, that for all his talk about Tom, he didn't seem to have an honest boy's hero-worship for him. Some of his narratives almost had the abominable ring of tale-telling!

Then we heard that Tom Robertson had got a dog. It was a stray, which had followed him in the street, and he had taken it home. Laurie said stray dogs often followed Tom, and he gave them part of his lunch. Also the Robertsons kept three cats, and there was generally a kitten.

Aunt Emmot observed that she was sure it was a good sign in people when they liked animals. Mr. Pryce said maybe, certainly animals were very well in their place; cattle should be kindly treated or they were damaged as human food, and any fool might understand it was one's interest to use horses kindly, but as for cats, they scratched furniture and made horrible noises at night, and dogs sometimes got hydrophobia. He did not believe in wasting food or affection on useless animals when so many human beings needed both.

I ventured to remark that I did not think any human beings get less food or affection for either that are given to animals; probably they get rather the more, because the practice of giving anything is apt to grow into a general habit.

Aunt Emmot said that really she should like a cat. But she spoke hopelessly, as of the unattainable.

I asked Laurie why we never saw Tom Robertson. By Laurie's own account they were always together, and yet when I chanced to encounter Laurie in the street—as I did pretty often—he was always alone, creeping along, either close under the walls or else on the very edge of the kerbstone. I asked why Tom was never invited to tea; I even hinted that on some fine half-holiday I might take both the boys to the Zoo or the Tower. I began to want to make Tom's acquaintance on my own account, for I was a stranger in the neighbourhood, the house was horribly dull, and it seemed to me that he must be really a jolly little fellow. For day after day I heard many little things about him which I have not been able to put into this story; how he rang the bells of the houses all the way down St. Martin's Lane, how he fought the bully of his class, how he sent a valentine to the parish beadle, how he fell in love with a little girl at the Ladies' School near Covent Garden, and used to stand in the avenue of St. Paul's Churchyard, flashing a bit of broken looking-

glass into her schoolroom while she was at her drawing-lessons. Tom wrote some "poetry" too, which Laurie repeated to us. I remember one verse; I have often caught myself mechanically repeating it:

"If your walls are so narrow  
You cannot see far,  
Knock a hole in your ceiling,  
And look at a star!"

It seemed to me there must be really something in Tom. Certainly I, who had never seen him, knew far more of him than I did of Laurie, who was with me every day. Laurie's own personality was most insipid. If one asked him whether he liked or disliked anything, he answered, "Yes, thank you," or "No, thank you," as seemed to him to be the correct thing. But he told Tom's likes and dislikes plainly enough, even in Tom's own vigorous language! I could never help wondering how Tom had patience with such a nincompoop.

I was still a resident in the house when Laurie caught a bad cold. He had been sitting out on the leads on one of those autumn days when the subtle winter change enters the air and lays deadly fingers on anything that is not warm with an inner vitality. I could not wonder that Laurie did not quickly throw off his insidious enemy. I did not know much of medicine then, but I had an instinct, which my experience has confirmed, that drugs and dieting are seldom more than helps to uphold a constitution till it rallies itself from any shock it may have received. If there's no constitution there, it is not much that drugs and diet can do. But it's odd, sometimes, how little will set a constitution going again. So when I saw that poor Miss Emmot's potions and potages were all unavailing, I suggested that we should invite Tom to cheer up his friend. I volunteered to go to the Robertsons' house, to guarantee to the parents that Laurie had nothing "catching." I wanted to bring Tom in as a surprise to the invalid. But when Miss Emmot and I conferred, we both discovered that we didn't know the Robertsons' exact address. She thought it was in Lancaster Place, and I fancied it was in Leicester Square. We felt sure that the Robertsons had lived in one of these places, and must have removed to the other. But this put an end to the scheme for a stimulating surprise. And Laurie was asleep when I went to his room to question him. Next morning he had severe symptoms of acute pneumonia, and any idea of a visitor became impossible.

He only lived three days; he made no fight for his life. From the first of the attack he wandered in his mind. He talked a great deal about Tom. He thought Tom was in the room, and he spoke to him and then answered himself—answered quite in keeping with Tom's character, and after Tom's manner of speech. There are a great many strange things about delirium.

Mr. Pryce did not see much of his son during his illness. At first he pooh-poohed it. When it grew unmistakably serious, he said his feelings were too sensitive to bear such a scene, but a bedside was a woman's sphere, and was to be my professional arena. So only Aunt Emmot and I were with little Laurie when he died.

Laurie's schoolmaster came up to ask about his pupil's last days, and to look upon him in his coffin. Aunt Emmot was very grateful to him for this attention, and for the kind words he spoke about Laurie's abilities and steadiness.

"I am glad he was appreciated," she sobbed, "for, God forgive me, I did wish sometimes that he might get a little more like that dear lad, his great friend!"

"I am so glad to hear he had a boy friend," said the teacher. "I was afraid he was one of those who go alone too much, which is never wholesome. It is a pity he didn't fraternise with some of his own schoolfellows."

Aunt Emmot looked vaguely at me. She was in such a state of bewildered grief that she might have let this remark pass without any inquiry or comment. But I knew what she had been saying before the schoolmaster came in, so I spoke.

"His chief friend is one of your boys, sir," I said. "And I know Miss Laurie was desirous of sending a message to that boy. Perhaps you will convey it. She wished to tell him that she had hoped to invite him to see her nephew once more in life, and that, when it was too late for that, and Laurie was wandering, he talked of nothing but Tom Robertson."

"Aye," said the poor lady; "he would have it Tom was sitting on the bed with him, and Laurie told him he'd got his cold dawdling on the damp leads, and he made believe that Tom answered that Laurie must be particular to pronounce the 'p.' I suppose that's Tom's funny way; and I'm sure he's a dear boy, and Laurie loved him, and so do I, for Laurie's sake," and she wept anew.

"Mr. Pryce thought young Robertson may wish to follow the funeral," I whispered. (Mr. Pryce was getting up quite an imposing procession.)

The schoolmaster looked from one to the other with bewilderment. Then he drew me aside and said:

"Tell the family I will do what I can to further their wishes, but please come outside with me, Mr. Ogilvie—I think I can speak to you better in the street."

What he had to say was that there must be some very queer mistake, for he had no pupil of the name of Tom Robertson. He never had had one! He was so distressed about the matter, that he insisted on my going home with him and examining his books. Then we turned up the Directory for Lancaster Place and Leicester Square, and there were no Robertsons living in either. There were Robertsons in King William Street, and we made some inquiries and



found that the family consisted of an aged man and three old-maid daughters.

There was a bully in Laurie's class—the bully "Tom Robertson" was supposed to have thrashed. I had his name and his nature right enough, and the schoolmaster recognised him at once, yet nobody knew anything about his day of humiliation. When we asked the beadle if he had received a valentine last February, he answered indignantly, "Most certainly not—there was nobody livin' would have the himpidence." Of course we could not find out if there was anything at the bottom of the doll-in-the-mud story.

"I can understand it all," I said, at the close of our confabulation. "Tom Robertson is just Laurie Pryce as he wished to be, and might have been." I thought with a curious pang of the discouragement which had been thrown on the poor child's tentative narratives of Tom's prowess, not only by Mr. Pryce, but even by the interested and admiring aunt. And I—I had wanted to know "Tom," and had despised the soul which had created him out of its own missed possibilities!

The schoolmaster and I agreed that unless there was some direct occasion for telling the whole truth, we would keep silence. The schoolmaster was considerate for Mr. Pryce (he did not know him very well), and was afraid he might be hurt by this posthumous discovery of "untruthfulness." I was sorry rather for Aunt Emmot, for I felt she might be remorseful. But I did not much anticipate that they would renew the topic of the Robertsons. Mr. Pryce, at least, was too much absorbed in the funeral arrangements, in a death mask he was getting made, and in a memoir he was writing. As for Aunt Emmot, I knew she was given to let life in general slip by, like ill-discerned scenery in a fog. She never asked me a question; though she did remark:

"I should have thought such a boy as Tom Robertson might have come to see me just for once. Laurie must surely have talked about me. Yet, perhaps it is not the boy's own blame, Mr. Ogilvie. The parents may not care to keep up the acquaintance."

Long afterwards, when I had left the place, I returned to visit her. I found her alone in the dismal sitting-room, with the effigies of her sister and her nephew. Mr. Pryce was in his study, which got all the sunshine that ever came into that house, and had red curtains and Art-Union engravings on the wall. Aunt Emmot said to me:

"It's very strange, isn't it, that whenever I think of our dear Laurie it seems easier to remember that boy Tom Robertson, whom I never saw? Laurie is fading from my mind like a dream. It makes me feel quite unnatural!"

"When you remember Tom Robertson you do remember Laurie," I said. "For Tom was—what Laurie loved."

She said I had the art of saying soothing things, and she hoped

they might be true. Tom must be growing up ; she hoped he was not much changed.

I said I thought Tom was not made of the stuff which changes much.

And this bit of writing that I have stored away in my desk is Laurie's—or "Tom's"; for where one is, there is the other. Each answers to the other's name. But what about Tom's mother, and the little sister, and the wonderful uncle, and the dog, who all helped to make Tom what he was ? I have not lost my own faith in Tom, and so they must be where he is—somewhere.

Is this dreaming, or is it the awakening out of dreams ?

I. FVIE MAYO.

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## TO A SWALLOW.

FROM SULLY PRUDHOMME.

YOU, who can mount to starry skies,  
And no steep hills appal ;  
You, who can face declivities,  
Nor fear to fall—

Who need not bend by rushing stream,  
But sip from clouds the rain,  
And bask in the celestial beam  
Man seeks in vain—

You, who to other climes your wings  
Can spread when tempests come,  
Faithful to both those peerless things—  
Free range and home—

Oh, bird, my soul can rise like you  
Beyond the mists of night ;  
Can seek the distant and the blue  
In happy flight !

Can soar on rapid wing and fly  
From earth to realms above,  
Can live like you for liberty  
And constant love !

C. E. MEETKERKE.

## A PERILOUS ADVENTURE.

ONE cold, cheerless night early in November I was driving from a well-known market town in Warwickshire, business having detained me later than usual. The road was a very lonely one, rough and stony in places owing to recent floods, the moon had not yet risen, and but few stars could be seen, for heavy showers of sleet fell at intervals, accompanied by a piercing north-east wind; but I was inured to the cold, and "Merlin," my surefooted horse, knew every step of the way, having traversed it so often.

Wrapping my rug more closely round me, I pictured the bright welcome awaiting me at home, and paid but little heed to the darkness and inclemency of the night. With the exception of some travelling hawkers, with their van laden with door-mats and brushes slowly wending their way towards Drayton Bushes, I met no one for the first three miles, an unusual stillness prevailed, only broken by the sound of Merlin's hoofs as he trotted briskly along. After a time the clouds dispersing the moon shone out a little, and I could discern the Avon, like a silver thread, flowing between the meadows, and distinguish the sound of its waters rushing over the weir. This led my thoughts to a report, recently circulated, of a terrible crime having been perpetrated near Binton Bridge. "A Jew pedlar waylaid, robbed and murdered, and his body, together with his rifled pack, thrown into the Avon." Very great was the alarm and consternation which pervaded the neighbourhood, for ours was a quiet agricultural district, and deeds of violence and bloodshed had happily been unknown amongst us for many years.

I remembered a story that old Ralph Fowler, the patriarch of the village, was wont to tell in my boyhood's days, "of a woman being murdered by her husband on Cranwell Leys, and how the miscreant being caught redhanded was convicted and hanged in front of Warwick Gaol, and afterwards gibbeted near the scene of the murder, according to the barbarous custom of those times," and Ralph never failed to add "that folks would rather go miles out of their way than cross Cranwell Leys after nightfall, for the screeching and clanking of those rusty chains were something awful!"

All traces of the gibbet had long since disappeared, the Common itself had been enclosed, but Cranwell Leys was a weird, isolated spot, and few people cared to pass that way after dark; nevertheless it was the nearest road to "The Grange" where I lived, and, not being troubled by any superstitious fears, I invariably chose it.

I had proceeded about two miles further, and was passing a wood which extends for some distance by the roadside, when Merlin

shied at some tall object under the trees, and then broke off into a gallop. I had some difficulty in restraining him, for his head was towards his own warm stable, and while endeavouring to soothe and quiet my frightened steed I heard footsteps approaching, and a woman's voice, calling in tones of entreaty, "Stop sir, do *please* stop!"

On looking round I saw a lady trying to overtake me, so I pulled up. She wore a long black cloak with a fur collar, a bonnet and thick veil, and her hands were encased in a muff. She seemed in much distress, and asked, "Would I do her the favour of driving her to the next village, as she had missed the carrier's cart and was benighted?"

With this request I readily complied, feeling no small surprise that any lady should be out so late and unattended. I offered to assist her into the dog-cart, but she declined my help, and springing lightly up, was soon seated by my side. Beyond some casual remarks about the weather, we conversed but little, for we had left the shelter of the wood, and were now exposed to the gale, which was increasing in violence. My companion seemed afraid lest she should lose her veil, and was fastening it more securely, when a gust of wind blowing aside her cloak, revealed a *coat sleeve* and a *man's hand*!

Never shall I forget my feelings of horror! Without any means of defence, and already in the power of this rufian, what chance of escape had I? My first impulse was to drop my whip, and request the supposed lady to oblige me by picking it up, but that was a well-known ruse, and one likely to create suspicion, besides placing me at a disadvantage. I knew that every moment's delay only increased my peril, doubtless other accomplices were lying in ambush, and I must immediately adopt some expedient for getting rid of this villain.

Suddenly I remembered a leather case that I had about me, in shape like a pocket-book, but containing nothing more valuable than a collection of artificial flies and fish-hooks, for I was a follower of "Izaak Walton," and an ardent lover of "the gentle craft." So remarking, "that it was bitterly cold, and I must put on an extra wrap," I hastily drew a woollen scarf from my pocket, and contrived while doing this, to jerk the leather case out also, and this last fell into the road. Pulling up abruptly, I exclaimed, "What *must* I do? I have dropped my pocket-book, and I dare not leave the horse!"

I felt, rather than saw the greedy glare of piercing eyes fixed on me, as the intruder rose from her seat, and eagerly looked back, then saying, "There it is," in an exulting tone, she laid down her muff, nimbly jumped to the ground, and ran to seize the much coveted prize. Giving Merlin his head, I set off at full speed, keeping a sharp look-out as I drove along, and upon examining the lady's muff, my worst fears were confirmed, for, carefully concealed within, was a *loaded pistol*!

Dark clouds obscured the moon, but a few stars were shining,

enabling me faintly to distinguish surrounding objects. I had just reached the cross roads, and was passing Cranwell Leys, when a low whistle caught my attention, and I perceived two dark figures crouching beneath the hedge. Laying aside my whip, I grasped the pistol in readiness for an encounter. The men sprang from their hiding-place, and were coming towards me when they paused, irresolute, not seeing their comrade. Their sudden appearance frightened Merlin, he darted across the lane, and galloped in the direction of home, at a furious pace; a sharp report rang clearly out, and a bullet flew harmlessly by, but we soon distanced our pursuers, and shortly afterwards, I could descry the friendly lights of the old Grange.

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The following March, being in Warwick during the Assizes, I entered the court. Three men were being tried for "highway robbery with violence," their guilt was clearly proved, and as they had been previously convicted, their sentences were proportionately heavy. Just as the prisoners were being removed, I was startled on seeing the evil expression of one of them as he fixed his eyes on me. Instantly I recalled the night of "my perilous adventure," and I have no doubt that his companions in crime were the other two ruffians lying in wait on "Cranwell Leys."

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## POMPEII.

HERE is the City, like an open book,  
Its secrets all disclosed, things foul and fair,  
Splendour and pomp and sin and shame laid bare  
To the noonday sun; here we may come, and look,  
And read the story; how the city took  
Its pleasure, how it lived, and laughed at care,  
Flaunting it in the golden summer air,  
Under the cloudless heaven, and might not brook  
To smirch gilt sandals. See where painted dame  
And silken gallant trod the stepping-stones,  
Shedding Arabia Felix as they came,  
Nor ever deemed the city's bleached bones  
Should lie like this for all the world to view,  
In a strange world that Cæsar never knew!

Roofless the temples, where no suppliants come;  
Broken the columns, and the altars cold;  
Empty the shrines, the auspices are told;  
Silent the fountain in the atrium;

The rose is dead, the children's laughter's dumb;  
 The statues fall'n; the purple and the gold  
 Of Babylonian hangings turned to mould.  
 Hushed in the market-place the busy hum;  
 Buyer and seller gone; the scales are rust;  
 The wine is spilled; the merchandise is dust.  
 No noise of clattering wheels, no hurrying feet;  
 No idlers at the corners of the street.  
 The city's dead—on one tremendous day  
 Time ceased, and life affrighted fled away.

Here seventeen hundred years the poppies grew,  
 And wrote the city's epitaph in flame.  
 The kindly southern seasons went and came;  
 Above the violet sea the heavens stretched blue;  
 The slim straight olive-shoots sprang up anew;  
 Forgotten was the city's place and name,  
 And Nature hid the grave as if in shame.  
 Only the vines a fiercer sweetness drew  
 Out of the fires that slumber deep below;  
 And sometimes goatherds, wandering soon and late,  
 Seeing upon the night the angry glow,  
 Like the Archangel's sword at Eden's gate,  
 Run red among the stars, remembered well  
 Old tales of Phlegethon and the mouth of hell.

The amphitheatre gapes to the empty sky—  
 Silent, since on an August noontide all  
 The people sat and watched the Samnite fall,  
 And clapped their hands to see the Thracian die,  
 And "Habet! Habet!" cried. Then, suddenly,  
 They saw a cloud rise o'er the mountain-wall,  
 In likeness of a pine-tree straight and tall,  
 With branches bright and dark, that spread on high,  
 And spread and spread, until the sun turned black,  
 Earth shook with dreadful sound, the sea ran back,  
 And that strange tree became a rain of fire,  
 And dim, vast shapes, like giants of the prime,  
 Cast down to Tartarus at the birth of Time,  
 Came forth as if to tell that Time must now expire.

\* \* \* \* \*

The landscape sleeps in the golden afternoon;  
 The fertile fields of fair Campania blest,  
 Laugh with their fourfold harvest. From the west  
 Zephyr scarce breathes, the silver olives swoon,  
 The fig-tree spreads her fingers to the sun.  
 On every stone the emerald lizards rest;  
 The Happy Land is all in roses drest,  
 With great-armed crimson cactus flowers bestrewn.  
 And, behind all, dark, silent, ominous,  
 The slumbrous purple of Vesuvius  
 Crouches against the sky. The cloud by day,  
 By night the pillar of fire, is there alway.  
 The tiger sleeps; and round about his knees,  
 Cluster the grape-vines and the olive-trees.

M. A. M. MARKS.



